













# LIVES

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OF AMERICANS	{	THE BIG SEA THE ASTORS LANTERNS ON THE LEVEE	<i>by Langston Hughes</i> <i>by Harvey O'Connor</i> <i>by William Alexander Percy</i>
OF BRITONS	{	SIR RICHARD BURTON'S WIFE JOHNSON WITHOUT BOSWELL SHELLEY	<i>by Jean Burton</i> <i>edited by Hugh Kingsmill</i> <i>by Newman Ivey White</i>
OF FRENCHMEN	{	PAUL CÉZANNE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC	<i>by Gerslile Mack</i>
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OF AN AUSTRIAN	{	MOZART	<i>by W. J. Turner</i>

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**JOHN KENDRICK BANGS**

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JOHN KENDRICK BANGS  
ABOUT 1900

# JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

HUMORIST OF THE NINETIES

*The Story of an  
American Editor — Author — Lecturer  
and His Associations*

BY

FRANCIS HYDE BANGS



*New York*



1941

ALFRED · A · KNOPF



TO

*GEORGE EMERSON BREWER, Jr.*

§

I KNEW A HUMORIST WHO IN A GOOD DEAL  
OF RATTLE HAD A GRAIN OR TWO OF SENSE.  
HE SHOCKED THE COMPANY BY MAINTAIN-  
ING THAT THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD WERE  
TWO,—POWER AND RISIBILITY, AND THAT  
IT WAS THE DUTY OF EVERY PIOUS MAN TO  
KEEP UP THE COMEDY.

—Emerson's *Journals*



*For me, my craft is sailing on,  
Through mists today, clear seas anon.  
Whate'er the final harbor be  
'Tis good to sail upon the sea!*

— J. K. B.



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## *CONTENTS*

I.	Along the Genealogical Line	3
II.	Growing Up to Manhood	18
III.	<i>Acta Columbiana</i> : Collegiate Vituperator	36
IV.	H. C. Bunner Lectures J. K. Bangs	56
V.	Humors of <i>Life</i> : Antical Manhattaner	62
VI.	Clearing the Way	87
VII.	Literary Associations of the Early Nineties	105
VIII.	Rising Repute: <i>Coffee and Repartee</i>	123
IX.	Three Weeks in Politics	133
X.	Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany	145
XI.	<i>A House-Boat on the Styx</i> , and Others	161
XII.	Man of Letters	183

## *Contents*

XIII. Editor of <i>Harper's Weekly</i>	207
XIV. Five Years of Confusion: 1902–1907	228
XV. Retreat to Maine	252
XVI. Lecturer and Salubrity	269
XVII. Patriot: War and Death	285
Appendix and Acknowledgments	298
Index	<i>follows page</i> 300

---

## *ILLUSTRATIONS*

John Kendrick Bangs about 1900	<i>frontispiece</i>
Johnny Bangs	24
Tintype of Bangs as T. Carlyle Smith, Collegiate Vituperator	50
Rejected Bangs. From the <i>New York Press</i> , 1894	142
Creator of <i>A House-Boat on the Styx</i> . From a color- portrait of Bangs on fungus by Peter Newell	174
A Study in Hats at the Turn of the Century: Bangs, J. Henry Harper, and David A. Munro of the <i>North American Review</i>	208
Lillian Russell as Lady Teazle	244
Bangs in France, 1918	286



**JOHN KENDRICK BANGS**

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*ALONG*  
*THE GENEALOGICAL LINE*

**I**N his onetime celebrated lecture *The Evolution of the Humorist*, first delivered in an early year of the Genial Nineties, John Kendrick Bangs was wont to declare that a humorist had better not prate vaingloriously of his family tree lest he find cocoanuts thereon. Bangs here betrayed a belief in an evolutionary process, though lines later penned by him indicate that he did not worry much about its simian implications:

Whate'er my forebears may have been,  
Ape, insect, bird, flesh, fowl, or fin,  
I am myself; and rain or shine  
Intend to fill the place that's mine.  
Say what you will, prove what you can  
About the origin of man —  
No line of monkey ancestry  
Can make a monkey out of me!

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Independent of hereditary influences, however, as Bangs may have deemed himself to be, a scrutiny of his genealogical line declares him to be its product.

The founder and progenitor of the Bangs Family in America was Edward Banges, who sailed at the age of thirty-one into Plymouth Harbor, Massachusetts, aboard the ship *Anne*, in the latter days of July, 1623, just in time to qualify as a Pilgrim Father. Since his arrival he has had a park dedicated to him at Plymouth and an incommodious stone bench therein unveiled in his honor.

Records of Edward Banges show that he acted as captain of the guard against the Indians and that he was associated on Governor Bradford's staff with two gentlemen romantic in story, John Alden of Ducksborrow and Myles Standish of Standish. As a constructive force in the community Edward employed himself in the making of wolf-traps and in the laying out of "a convenient way from Sandwich unto Plymouth." Among other things, he also supervised the building of the first ship launched at Plymouth, which tradition says was named the *Rebecca* after his second wife. Efforts to discover who Rebecca was have so far proved futile. Small hope remains that she may be found to have shipped on the *Mayflower*.

In later years Edward moved down the Cape to Nauset, now Eastham. At the incorporation of this new town he became its first treasurer and held the office for twenty years. He appears to have been a man of sobriety, and there is no

## *Along the Genealogical Line*

indication in the old records that he possessed a sense of humor. Indeed, one of his chief duties as a selectman was to complain to the court of all persons who absented themselves from public worship on the Sabbath, so that the offenders might be put in the stocks, or be made to suffer corporal punishment if they denied the Scriptures.

Edward Bangs died at eighty-six, having had two wives and ten children — one by his first wife, Lydia Hicks, and nine by Rebecca. The child by Lydia Hicks was a son who produced but one son, who died without issue. The children by Rebecca were eight daughters, who changed their name before producing progeny, and one son, Jonathan. Jonathan thus became the saviour of the Bangs patronymic. He had twelve children by his first wife, Mary Mayo, and none by two subsequent wives. In a cemetery in Brewster, the headstones of Jonathan's first two wives have the family name spelled "Bangs"; on Jonathan's stone, 1728, the name is reduced with military economy to "Bangs."

Captain Jonathan Bangs was early a leader in military affairs. He is constantly mentioned in connection with military companies. In furtherance of his own martial strain he fathered three martial sons, captains all; and he was, as well, the great-great-grandfather of Commodore Edward Preble, who took charge of the frigate *Constitution*, lovingly called "Old Ironsides," and in 1804 commanded the United States Fleet at Tripoli with valor and success. We like to think that Commodore Preble inherited some of

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

his intrepidity from Captain Jonathan through his mother, born Mehetabel Bangs of Portland, Maine.

Having cited the collateral commodore as an indication of intrepidity in the Bangs blood, it behooves us to consider Captain Jonathan as the possible generator of a sense of humor. Such a consideration cannot be dismissed as trifling. Captain Jonathan was not only the ancestor of John Kendrick Bangs, but also of our outstanding representative of Cape Cod humor, Joseph C. Lincoln. There is likewise good ground to credit him with being the forebear of Thomas Bangs Thorpe of Louisiana. Thorpe, born a Yankee, wandered in his early manhood about the newly-developing American Southwest and wrote many a tall tale of frontier life. His story "The Big Bear of Arkansas," 1841, established him as a principal founder of our Western humor. In addition, Captain Jonathan was the ancestor of that Edward Bangs of Massachusetts who is stated upon notable authority to be the author of America's famous Revolutionary ballad "The Yankee's Return from Camp." In this ballad the seed of the Comic Yankee is early manifest, and we have a humorous delineation of General Washington, the Father of Our Country, with all his pride and feathers, before he had become congealed for statuary purposes or suffered dehumanization for the edification of school-children. The notable authority for the Bangs authorship of "The Yankee's Return from Camp" is Edward

## *Along the Genealogical Line*

Everett Hale, who found among his father's papers a letter from Judge Thomas Dawes stating that the ballad was a sudden effusion of his departed Harvard class-mate Edward Bangs. Young Bangs, as a sophomore, had joined the Middlesex farmers in the pursuit of 1775, and in the summer, apparently, had observed General Washington on parade.

Having arrived at the Revolution in our consideration of Jonathan Bangs as a generator of humor, we shall hastily skip down the direct genealogical line to the same period, merely stating that Captain Jonathan begat Captain Samuel, who begat plain Joseph, who begat Lemuel. With Lemuel, the great-grandfather of John Kendrick, we make pause, not only because with him we reach the Revolution, but because in addition to the qualities of intrepidity and humor — albeit sometimes unconscious — he introduces into the picture characteristics of independence and outspokenness, and likewise, it must be confessed, an extraordinary loquacity.

Lemuel Bangs, born on the Cape, was the first of his line to leave Massachusetts. He lived for a time in Connecticut, and finally in New York. He was at various times blacksmith, surveyor, school-teacher. In the French and Indian wars he had been a commissary, in the war of the Revolution an adjutant. His freedom of spirit did not wait upon the Declaration of Independence. Previous to 1776, on an occasion when he and other Whigs were assembled at Nichol's

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

Tavern, Stratford, Connecticut, Lemuel declared that he would be willing to die and suffer eternal punishment if he could be the means of making America free. So vehement was Lemuel's declaration that a certain Parson Ross was startled into leaving the gathering. "It's a good thing to be zealous, Mr. Bangs," exclaimed the parson, "but not too zealous. Where is my hat? I must be going!"

Lemuel was gifted with a vivid imagination. This he delighted to exercise before the family fire, thrilling the never-ending company of his children with graphic accounts of his war experiences, unquestionably indulging poetic license therein and preluding that extravagance which was later to mark many of the tales of his great-grandson. Lemuel was a learned man and possessed a good memory. Once, in later years, when his son Nathan was preaching to a congregation and had misquoted an author, Lemuel interrupted the sermon and corrected his son before permitting the service to proceed. This act, charitably interpreted, entitles Lemuel to stand with those who prefer truth to decorum — although, perhaps, rather too abruptly.

We have now come to Nathan Bangs, the grandfather of John Kendrick and the first bearer of the patronymic to get himself sufficiently forward to necessitate his inclusion in dictionaries of national biography. Nathan was that which was denominated in his day "a profound theologian." His personal history more than that of any other man resumes the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church

## *Along the Genealogical Line*

in America during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. He is ranked by the ablest historians second only to Bishop Asbury in the making of American Methodism.

Reared by Lemuel in the Church of England, there was a time in his youth when Nathan was inclined to treat Methodists with contempt. There was a Sunday morning when Nathan attended a Methodist assembly with a young man with whom he had been on a frolic a few evenings before. The young man whispered in Nathan's ear a jocose allusion to the occasion, and they both broke into immoderate laughter. The minister eyed the irreverent youths and extinguished their unseemly mirth with the dire warning: "There is no laughter in Hell!"

Shortly after this event, Nathan was teaching school in a Dutch community near Niagara in Canada. He there lived in a home where he found a small library, through which he became acquainted with Milton, Bunyan, and Hervey's *Meditations*. Under influence of these writers, he began thinking upon the subject of man's native depravity. One day, while walking in meditative mood, so the scripture reads, a sudden ray of divine illumination struck his mind like a flash of lightning, accompanied by the words: "I have anointed thee to preach the Gospel!" Nathan fell to his knees, crying: "Here am I!" The divine message was effectively delivered, for Nathan was soon thereafter ordained to the ministry through imposition of the hands of Bishop Asbury.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

In 1801, as an itinerant preacher and circuit rider, Nathan in his early twenties began carrying the Gospel into the wilds of western New York and the pathless forests of Canada. His early experiences as an itinerant awoke him to the need of education for Methodist preachers, and his subsequent life was largely devoted to creating the means of meeting that end. It is said that no man prior to him did as much as he for the intellectual life of his denomination.

In his early years as a preacher Nathan was doubtless evangelical at the expense of decent moderation. A writer describes his force as a speaker when in his thirties, and tells of jubilatic meetings in which a certain mightiness of thought and feeling bore down all before him. At one such meeting where Nathan preached, it was estimated that "two hundred hearers were awakened under a single sermon; they fell like wounded men, on the right and on the left; he preached on for two hours; and it is said that an earthquake, shaking the camp through those awful hours, could hardly have produced a more irresistible excitement."

Nathan was the most prolific writer of American Methodism during its first century. He is regarded as the founder of its periodical literature. His editorial contributions to the *Christian Advocate*, the *Methodist Magazine*, and the *Quarterly Review*, would fill scores of volumes. Nathan wrote many books and pamphlets, historical, biographical,

## *Along the Genealogical Line*

controversial. His most extensive labor was a *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* in four volumes.

Nathan was of mystical endowment, and was ever independent in thought and action. He refused positions of the highest authority lest he sacrifice free utterance of opinion. He twice refused the presidency of Wesleyan University, finally accepting it on the condition that he should resign as soon as a suitable successor could be found. He declined election as first Methodist Bishop of Canada, where he had been a principal founder of Methodism; and twice he declined nomination to the Episcopal Chair which Asbury had occupied. Nathan was not in sympathy with the prohibition policies of his church; and when some bothersome brethren objected to his use of tobacco, he informed them that he was equally acceptable to the Lord with or without a pipe in his face. It had been in 1806, in Edwardsburg, Upper Canada, that Nathan Bangs, itinerant preacher, had married a Canadian girl, Mary Bolton. For this comparatively early marriage, then a rare event among Methodist itinerants, Bishop Asbury had rallied Nathan, humorously, before a whole conference. "I knew," said the good bishop, shaking his gray locks, "I knew that the young maidens would be all after him; but as he has conducted the matter very well, let his character pass." Nathan continued to conduct the matter well, he and Mary living together until his death fifty-six years later. At their Golden Wedding,

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

Nathan spoke of Mary, not without reason, as a fruitful vine, for she had borne him eleven children, the youngest of whom, Francis Nehemiah Bangs, the father of John Kendrick, was already in his twenty-ninth year.

Why Francis Nehemiah Bangs was named after the Jew in the *Old Testament* whom Artaxerxes sent to assist in the building of Jerusalem remains unknown. Such elongated Hebraic appellations are not always pretty tags for Anglo-Saxons to carry with them into untheologic times. Whatever significance Nathan Bangs may have attached to his son's middle name, the son either forgot or hid under a glass darkly, for in the days of his fame he was known, and preferred to be known, as Francis N. Bangs. He also seems to have doffed the habit of church-going. His mother, in her widowed years, ever solicitous that her son walk in the path of a good Methodist, once said to him: "Francis, I hope you always go to the Methodist Church." And Francis is said to have comforted her marvellous much with the somewhat equivocal reply: "Why, my dear Mother, you may be very sure that I never go to any other!"

A change comes over the Bangs line with the arrival of Francis N., which, as we take it, reflects a change coming over American life in general. Life becomes more worldly, more high-pitched, and less longevious; and the injunction to increase and multiply finds a curb in the new economic scheme. An anecdote which tells of a nocturnal encounter of the father of John Kendrick with one of America's great

## *Along the Genealogical Line*

literary artists may point for us here the trend from the older ways of life toward characteristics more modern. Here we have the first historic contact of a member of this particular Bangs line with American Literature, pure if not undefiled, a contact free from the parochialism of Nathan and pointing to the relatively complete liberation of John Kendrick.

It is related that one night in his youth, when returning late from a club dinner with Joseph W. Harper, Jr., Francis N. Bangs was astonished at the sight of a man clinging to a lamppost. The man's hat had rolled into the street, and Bangs politely picked it up and returned it to him. The limp owner profusely thanked Bangs and his friend; then, saying that they might like to know the name of the gentleman who was indebted to them for so much courtesy, he solemnly introduced himself as Mr. Edgar Allan Poe. Bangs responded by remarking that the meeting was a strange coincidence, since his name was Tay and his friend's was Toe. Poe immediately rose to the occasion, observing that the three of them were well met, for together they made a po-ta-to. Having thus testified to the clarity of his intellect, despite the instability of his equilibrium, the great poet bowed very low and continued his uncertain perambulations.

Francis N. Bangs was the first of his line to be a full-fledged New Yorker. Although Nathan lived in New York for fifty years and was one of the city's most striking figures,

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

he had been born in Connecticut. But his son Francis N. was almost completely the product of New York life. Aaron J. Vanderpoel, president of the Manhattan Club, said of him at the time of his death: "No man among us was by birth, education, general business and professional training, a more perfect type of a successful citizen of the city of New York."

Interrupted in the practice of law by the Civil War — in which he served with the New York National Guard at Fort McHenry — Francis N. Bangs quickly reëstablished himself and may be truly said to have begun what Roscoe Conkling called "his rapid and striking career." Bangs came notably to the fore as a fearless advocate at the time of Boss Tweed and the Ring Misrule in New York City. He had a part in the founding of the Bar Association of the city, and was very active in the proceedings of the Bar against the Tammany judges. "Owing in great measure to his personal intervention," says the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1928, "Judges John H. McCunn of the superior court of New York City, and G. G. Barnard of the supreme court, were removed from office, and Judge Albert Cardozo was compelled to resign." Bangs, a witness at the trial of Barnard, saw Barnard convicted on every charge to which he testified. For many years interesting anecdotes were related of Bangs's courage and address in resisting judicial insolence prevailing in the city courts.

## *Along the Genealogical Line*

Bangs was the founder of one of the preëminent law firms of the country, Bangs & Stetson, a firm in which Alphonso Taft requested that his son William Howard Taft be given an opening for the practice of law, in which President Garfield's sons, James and Harry, acted as clerks while pursuing their legal studies, and with which Grover Cleveland, between his presidential terms, was associated. The successor firm is at present headed by John W. Davis, former Ambassador to Great Britain and Democratic Presidential Nominee in 1924. Bangs himself, a strong Republican in politics, never held nor desired political office. He declined appointment to the Attorney-Generalship of the United States under two presidents.

At a meeting of the Bar of the City held in Francis N. Bangs's memory, December 1885, shortly after his death, a minute of his abilities, character, and attainments, emphasized his undeviating devotion to his profession. "The profession of the law," it said, "was to his mind large enough for the whole of him, — his industry, his learning, his wit, his eloquence, and his fervor." The minute of the Bar also emphasized the spirit of independence, such as we have already noted in Lemuel and Nathan, as a characteristic of Francis N. Bangs: "He was absolutely independent, tenacious of the dignity of his calling, firm in intellectual self-respect, and would not brook patronage in any shape or form. At no period of his career, even in its small be-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

ginnings, was it possible for him to be obsequious or subservient to any one, however wealthy, influential, or powerful."

Manton Marble, editor of the *New York World*, in an extended obituary notice in *Harper's Weekly*, December 19, 1885, has something pertinent to say of Francis N. Bangs's mental inheritance. Marble was a close friend of Bangs and had known the parents Nathan and Mary. "To recall [Nathan's] immense energy and polemic habit," writes Marble, "his broad, genial sympathies, his quick temper and his tender heart, leads fitly to an appreciation of his abler son. . . . But the swiftness of every mental process, the acuteness, the wit, of the great lawyer, were a maternal inheritance, and had a Gallic tinge. His mother was the child of an English father and a French mother, and when enfeebled by age, still carried in her refined features and brilliant eyes the trace of youthful beauty." The swiftness of Francis N. Bangs's mental processes and his wit are repeatedly mentioned by commentators, and these maternal inheritances he seems to have transmitted to John Kendrick, who became notable not only for his wit but for the rapidity and extemporaneity of his creations.

Early in his twenty-eighth year, March 1855, Francis N. Bangs had married Frances Amelia Bull, seventeen-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Mordecai Bull of Troy, New York. Shortly after the birth of a son, Francis Sedgwick Bangs, in December of that year, the family had removed

### *Along the Genealogical Line*

from New York City to Yonkers, where it remained for a decade. Two more sons were there born, William Nathan Bangs, 1859, and John Kendrick Bangs, May 27, 1862. The Reverend Nathan Bangs, who had died on the first day of his eighty-fifth year, May 3, 1862, thus passed away just twenty-four days too soon to lay the blessed hand of Methodism upon this the latest of his grandchildren.

*GROWING UP TO MANHOOD*

OFFICIAL documents are wanting by which to prove that John Kendrick Bangs was born in Yonkers, or, indeed, that he was born at all. This embarrassing fact Bangs discovered toward the close of his life when, during the World War, he had difficulty convincing the Passport Division of the Department of State that he was an American. However, with full faith in his father's veracity, Bangs always assumed that the place of his nativity was Yonkers. In prefacing his remarks before an audience in that town in the early nineties, he is on record as saying: "I was born in and have resided in Yonkers for a number of years; I have braved the perils of life in this community, and have endured without a murmur the privations common to us all."

In a "Confession" which he wrote the summer preceding his death for T. L. Masson's *Our American Humorists*, 1922, Bangs described the house in which he was born as overlooking the Hudson and shaded by noble elms, "but

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

latter-day improvements combined with the onward march of civilization have changed matters so that it now looks out upon long lines of cattle-cars . . . and is sheltered from the burning rays of the afternoon sun by an eight-story sugar-refinery, whose classic lines suggest the most flourishing period of the Gothic-Vandalian Renaissance." The intense cosmopolitanism of his nature Bangs attributed to the fact that he was born in Yonkers, since by that fact he escaped the narrow provinciality of the average New Yorker. He also attributed his sturdy Americanism to his Westchester County birth; for, as he understood the situation, "to be born in New York City is an almost certain indication of an alien strain whose prenatal affiliations are mainly either Slavic or Neo-Tipperarian."

Regarding his four years of infancy spent in Yonkers under the benign influence of noble elms, there is little we can say in addition to what Bangs has himself confessed. It is possible, however, that certain atmospheric influences prevailed and somehow effected an invasion of the infant's not impervious *pia mater*; for the Hudson valley thereabouts already had literary traditions, which, aptly enough, were of a humorous nature.

Breezes from a few miles up the river brought airs from Sleepy Hollow where Washington Irving lay but recently inurned. Yonkers was at this very time the dwelling place of Frederick Swartwout Cozzens, wine merchant and dry wit, whose *Sparrowgrass Papers*, 1856, with their scenes of

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

suburban comedy, were written against the homely background of his picturesque "Chestnut Cottage." Here, too, Cozzens had entertained the great Thackeray himself on a visit to Yonkers in November 1852, when the English humorist delivered a lecture on "Charity and Humor." Thackeray wrote from New York to his daughter in London: "One day I went out to Yonkers fifteen miles from here, on the Hudson River, and spent the pleasantest day I have had in the States: drove from the pretty village, a busy bustling new place lying on the river banks, thrice as broad as the Rhine, and as picturesque, to Irvington, nine miles, where good old Washington Irving lives. . . ." And last, but not least, our first typical American humorist of the so-called native school to achieve international renown, Charles Farrar Browne, was about the time of Bangs's birth lodged in a cottage on Pine Street, Yonkers, where he is reputed to have written some of his drolleries for *Vanity Fair*. Browne's first published volume, *Artemus Ward: His Book*, issued from the press May 17, 1862, ten days before Bangs was born. That it immediately sold forty thousand copies might be considered a happy augury for American humorists.

Yet such atmospheric influences as we have here indicated remain imponderables; and soon the increasing legal demands upon the time and energy of Bangs senior brought about in 1866 the return of the family to New York City. This transplantation enabled the young John Kendrick to

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

grow up a Manhattanite at that particular period of American life when the character of our civilization was becoming more and more urbanized.

It was shortly after the family's return to New York that John Kendrick's cultural education may be said to have begun. In the "Confession" already referred to, Bangs stated that whatever education he had was founded in a collection of postage-stamps, which he well-remembered as one of his treasured possessions at the age of five. From it he gained a considerable knowledge of geography and history. His letters, he asserted, were learned on the block system, and his first conscious reading was in a little cloth-covered volume, abundantly illustrated with rich-hued woodcuts, entitled *Mother Goose's Melodies*. These melodies deeply impressed themselves upon Bangs's mind, and with their free and natural rhythms seem to have abetted an inclination toward easy utterance which later found constant exercise in the thousands of poems, wise and otherwise, which streamed from his pen from youth to jocund age.

Bangs never wavered in his love for Mother Goose. Many years later, in 1899, he bravely championed this Homer of the Nursery and her innocent delights against threatened dethronement by a band of knowledgeable females who had accused her of immorality. Writing in *Literature, An International Gazette of Criticism*, under the caption "Mother Goose and the Higher Criticism," Bangs was frank to admit

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

that it was not well, as in the “ Hey-Diddle-Diddle ” verses, for the dish to run away with the spoon, but he had faith that the mind of a child would not perceive the wickedness of the act, nor be unduly saddened over the consequences of such a *mésalliance*. Only in later years might the child’s mind penetrate to a hidden meaning and blush over the im-morality of it all.

Bangs appears to have cherished his childhood copy of *Mother Goose*, for there appeared over the initials J.K.B. in *Harper’s Young People*, May 19, 1891, at a time when Bangs’s oldest son was entering his fourth year, the following lines under the title “ A Nursery Treasure ”:

How much I love you, little one,  
In this one act you see:  
The “ Mother Goose ” I give you, son,  
My mother gave to me.

The mother who had given John Kendrick this cherished nursery treasure died when her son Johnny was but six years old. At that time Francis N. Bangs called to his assistance in the running of his household and for the care of his children a Mrs. Nassau, the wife of a gentleman who worked in his office. Mrs. Nassau received from the Bangs family the name “ Aunt Deedee,” and by that appellation she was known to four generations of the family, with various members of whom she lived until her death, some years subsequent to that of John Kendrick, the last to survive of the three boys whom she had helped to bring up.

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

She always claimed that she saved Johnny Bangs's life, for she said that when she first joined the family she found Johnny cold, shivering, and neglected, sitting on the front steps. She at once knitted him a wool vest to keep him warm. Aunt Deedee was a great knitter, and the warm afghans she created were spread over the winter beds of Francis N. Bangs's children and grandchildren for forty years. Aunt Deedee did not neglect the spiritual side of her responsibilities either, for the Register of Baptisms, St. George's Church, New York, shows that John Kendrick Bangs, who was then her charge, was baptized a Protestant Episcopalian, March 23, 1869, in his seventh year.

When Johnny was but a little boy, just beginning to read and write, he became something of a declaimer. His father was wont to stand him sometimes on the dining-room table to recite passages from Shakespeare, and these recitations seem to have been carried off with *élan*. At least, father Bangs thought enough of the abilities of his young son in this regard to risk his amusing Ulysses S. Grant on an occasion when he had the General, then President-elect, to dinner. Johnny suffered no shell-shock before so august a presence.

By the age of nine, according to family legend, Bangs is reported to have progressed sufficiently in the epistolary art to address a letter to his father which began with the customary endearing salutation and then gave itself over to a transcription of the opening sentences of Thomas Jeffer-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

son's immortal "Declaration." Indeed, a spirit of independence and, in addition, an active political sense begin at this time to manifest themselves in the growing boy, possibly a reflection of his father's staunch Republicanism and intrepid warfare against corruption. For when the Tweed Ring was busy despoiling the citizens of New York of scores of millions of dollars, it happened that Tweed's young son, a neighbor, ventured to approach Johnny Bangs as he sunned himself upon the parental front steps. Johnny peremptorily demanded of Tweed junior whether he was a Republican or a Democrat, and, on learning that he was the latter, assisted him to the pavement with the aid of his boot.

Bangs at the age of ten was, according to his "Confession," headed for omniscience in a well-known private school in New York. Of its principal, Morris W. Lyon, and his influence, Bangs wrote: "He was a man of rare parts, vigorous, stern, sympathetic, and a master of all that he taught. . . . The boy was as much his concern as the teaching of the boy. Whether for good or for evil, my good teacher discovered at an early period of his association with me that there was a special affinity between words and myself, and while he did his best with the poor soil at his command to make me fructify along mathematical and other necessary lines, he devoted himself to the streams of verbosity, written, spoken, whispered, and signaled, of which I appeared to be, and undoubtedly was, a fount. I was especially encouraged to write compositions,



JOHNNY BANGS



## *Growing Up to Manhood*

and these I produced at fortnightly intervals throughout seven joyous school-years, expressing ideas either immature or overadvanced in six or eight times as many words as the case required, with the facility which I now recognize as a weakness. At the foot, and sometimes below it, in all my other classes, I invariably led my class in composition from the beginning to the end of my school life. I mention this in no spirit of vainglory, but in an endeavor to explain what has been rather one of my faults, for it is a sad fact that one of the bases of merit in those far-off writing days of mine was *length*, fluency, always a fatal gift, rather than conciseness operating to the advantage of my standing. I had not then, any more than I have now, the slightest desire even to rank or pose as a humorist, but it so happened that my glorious father, a man of infinite wit, used always to give me for the embellishment of my effort some story inextricably interwoven with laughter which I never failed to avail myself of, with the result that when on Commencement Day I read aloud to the assembled parents of my schoolmates the chosen product of the year there was always a laughing response from the audience, so that in a way I unconsciously began to measure my little success by the amount of smiling encouragement received."

In so far as authenticated instances are concerned the humor upon which John Kendrick fed in his youth was not entirely supplied by his father. As with *Mother Goose*, so also did it happen that the extravagant fabrications of

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Baron Munchausen and a *Gulliver's Travels*, with its misanthropy exorcised, a present from Mrs. Nassau, November 12, 1875, were favorite reading in his boyhood, and exhibited recurrent influence upon the more imaginative literary productions of his maturity. Indeed, if we can rely upon evidence furnished by a few old boyhood volumes which still rested on his library shelves at the time of his death, his youthful reading would appear to have been frequently in the vintage of his own day.

There remained on those shelves a book entitled *Dogs and Their Doings*, by the Rev. F. O. Morris, which had been presented as a composition prize to Johnny "from his teacher July 1, 1874." This book was repletely illustrated with benign-looking canines, calculated to arouse deep affection for beasts of that kind; and for dogs — especially for unfortunate mongrels — Bangs always had great fondness. Even when he had no dog of his own, Bangs poetically conceived that he had:

I have no dog, but it must be  
Somewhere there's one belongs to me —  
A little chap with wagging tail,  
And dark brown eyes that never quail,  
But look you through, and through, and through,  
With love unspeakable, but true.<sup>1</sup>

These lines, together with five other stanzas, make up the poem "My Dog," published in Bangs's *The Foothills of*

<sup>1</sup> By permission of The Macmillan Company, Publishers.

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

*Parnassus*, 1914. Probably nowhere in literature is a more sympathetic treatment of the humors of a dog to be found, and since this poem has won its way into many school-books and some of its lines into Mr. Morley's *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, it may stand for a significant trait of tenderness for animals early developed in Bangs's nature.

Besides the book on dogs, there were among other remainder viands of those early days a copy of Miss Mulock's *Adventures of a Brownie*, 1872. That Miss Mulock's book was one of Bangs's favorites is vouched for by the fact that the book was presented him by Mrs. Nassau at a time when he had the mumps and that "Brownie" became a nickname by which Aunt Deedee addressed him even to the last letter she wrote him when he was on his death bed. Another boyhood favorite of Bangs's was George T. Lanigan's *Fables of G. Washington Aesop*, 1878, also presented him by Mrs. Nassau, which is said to be the first travesty of the familiar fabulist in modern American dress.

There was also on Bangs's shelves an old copy of *The Squibob Papers*, by John Phoenix (George Horatio Derby); and we know that Bangs was early acquainted with this example of our Western humor which so greatly influenced Artemus Ward and Mark Twain. In an introduction which he contributed to a new edition of *Phoenixiana*, 1903, Bangs records that "from the day in the early seventies of a by-gone century when I was suspended from school for a joyous period of twenty-four hours for turning the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

solemn function of declamation into a riotous orgie of giggling by reciting Phoenix's Maritime Anecdote in which Miss Tarbox and Hardy Lee figure so prominently . . . I have always had a warm spot in my heart for the venerable Squibob." Bangs was early acquainted with Mark Twain, for a *Tom Sawyer*, in faded blue covers, remained as a memento of Christmas 1877. We may imagine what this book did for American youth. On the Centennial of Our Nation, 1876, Mark Twain's full-blooded and lusty *Tom Sawyer* stepped forth from Missouri to put out of joint the noses of Louisa May Alcott's "little men" and "little women" — which is more than Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *Story of a Bad Boy*, 1870, a copy of which Bangs also possessed, had been able to do.

The juvenile *St. Nicholas*, which began its pleasant career for boys and girls in 1873, came along in good time to furnish delight to young Bangs, and apparently, like so many other young people, he contributed his morsel to it. It was in 1908 that a reporter for the *Boston Herald* asked Bangs how he made his debut in literature, and was informed that Bangs first saw his name in print in *St. Nicholas*. "I came out strong as a Defender of the Birds," said Bangs. "That was ever so many years ago, but I'm defending them yet. When anyone tells me that roast-beef is better than canvas-back duck, I stand up for the bird every time!"

Oliver Herford, who knew Bangs well toward the begin-

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

ning of his professional career, once wrote of him on a place card for a literary dinner:

He was not naturally bad  
Or viciously inclined,  
But from his early youth he had  
A waggish turn of mind.

This waggish turn of mind, and other traits as well, were powerfully affected by Bangs's association with his father, for whom he had a most profound and sustained admiration. Though the elder Bangs at this time stood at the front of his profession in New York and had multitudinous legal demands upon him, he found time to delight in the play of mind of his youngest son. We have already been apprised of instances of this, but as John Kendrick grew to young manhood his intimacy with his father developed into a real state of good-fellowship. The two were often seen together dining out, and John Kendrick frequently visited the courts to see his father in action. Apparently the action was something to see!

Even to this day, after the passage of fifty and sixty years, those who survive and saw him in court remember Francis N. Bangs as a forceful personality, though not always with approval. He seems to have made a tremendous impression upon the members of the bar of his day, young and old. In the trial of *Stewart v. Huntington*, 1884, Joseph H. Choate referred to him as "the most astute, the most

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

crafty — in the best sense of the word — the most skillful of our profession.” At the meeting of the Bar in Bangs’s memory, December 1885, Chief Justice Noah Davis said Bangs was a remarkable man in his physical strength; and Frederic R. Coudert referred to him as one “ who met obstacles like a giant; if ever he used the giant’s strength with the tyranny of a giant, we must excuse and forget it, because he was thus made. . . . No process of softening the rocks in his path was ever known to him, — they must be shattered and blown apart and flung out of his way.” Elihu Root, fifty years later, April 17, 1935, wrote: “ As a youngster I knew Francis N. Bangs very well and was immensely impressed by his powerful personality.” And Charles C. Burlingham, April 20, 1935, wrote: “ I remember well his terrific fights with Mr. Parsons in the *Havemeyer* cases and with Mr. Choate in the *Cesnola* case.”

It was in the *Havemeyer* case of 1879 that Bangs faced John E. Parsons, the one lawyer for whom he had “ a deep-seated animosity,” and therefore the best opponent to bring out certain well-known defects of his qualities. Of this case Joseph S. Auerbach in his reminiscences *The Bar of Other Days*, 1940, says: “ Mr. Parsons alone represented the plaintiff, while counsel for the defendants were Francis N. Bangs and Judge John K. Porter. . . . I doubt whether there has ever been heard in court a more bitter arraignment by one lawyer of another than that of Mr. Bangs in his intemperate onslaught upon Mr. Parsons. For in invec-

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

tive Mr. Bangs had no superior, and Judge Porter sought in vain to restrain Mr. Bangs, even to the point of tugging at his coat tails, but to no purpose. Mr. Parsons was depicted as a lawyer without character or repute."

Bangs was known to be a little careless as to how he treated people, and it was also known that he regarded Mr. Parsons, rightly or wrongly, as a sanctimonious hypocrite. Despite the fact that Parsons was counsel for the opposition, Bangs called him to the witness stand when he claimed an intimate knowledge of facts bearing on the case. Parsons resented this as an indecency. Bangs nevertheless forced him to the stand, sarcastically denouncing him as "our learned opponent sheltering himself from the responsibility of a witness behind the sacred character of counsel." After the cross-questioning of Parsons, Bangs declared: ". . . in the testimony of Mr. Parsons we fail to find that which in the outset of the case he so well but so ignorantly pretended to know. He has said nothing disastrous to us. He has corroborated the testimony of the defendants, and he can no longer insinuate his honor and proclaim his disregard of it with the same breath."

It was during the progress of this trial that the presiding judge cautioned Bangs to be less ironic in his remarks, "for, after all, Mr. Parsons is a Christian gentleman." On hearing this, Bangs is said to have grabbed his papers and his hat and to have started for the door. The judge called him back and asked him where he was going. "If Mr. Parsons

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

is a Christian gentleman, as your Honor asserts," retorted Bangs, "I'm going out to be circumcised."

This anecdote is not a pretty one; but Bangs was not a pretty man. His humor, like his anger and his face, sometimes got the better of him; and when this took place in court it was not always to his advantage. Mr. Parsons won the case, even though Bangs, to his own satisfaction, made it difficult for him further to "insinuate his honor."

The quality of Bangs's wit was described by Manton Marble as the play of a powerful mind not with the shows of things but with their realities, a description further illuminated by Roscoe Conkling's allusion to Bangs's love of the candid and the real as distinguished from the affected and the false. Francis Lynde Stetson, Bangs's partner, in a memorial address in 1918 before the Century Association in honor of Joseph H. Choate, declared that during the preceding fifty years at the New York Bar hardly more than four of its members had been "notable for their wit, — Mr. Evarts, whose lambent humor tickled and illuminated, but never scorched; Francis N. Bangs, whose brilliant thrusts flashed like a meteor with a train of burning sparks; Frederic R. Coudert, of Gallic vivacity; and Mr. Choate, the fun-maker."

It was Mr. Choate, the fun-maker, who in the late seventies and early eighties became Bangs's chief rival at the trial bar of the city. Bangs, who had an "unbounded stomach for a fight," found in Choate his match, and more.

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

These two men were adversaries in a dozen celebrated legal actions, and their clashes in court were memorable and often severe. Choate's wit, fortified by his fun-making proclivities, gave him the edge over the Bangsian causticity.

It was in the *Cesnola* trial that the fun-making Choate, in an amusing reference to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, warned the jury that they must not be alarmed by the roaring noise they heard, for, after all, it was "not a real lion, but only Bangs, the lawyer." The *Cesnola* trial, which began in October 1882, was protracted to February 1884, when the verdict was handed down, favoring Choate and his client, General Luigi di Cesnola. Bangs, in the course of the trial, had reduced Cesnola in military rank from a general to a colonel.

Bangs asserted more than once that his life would be "shortened by that fellow Choate," and so it was. He died shortly after the *Cesnola* trial at the age of fifty-seven. Stetson, writing of the case, said: "Mr. Choate greatly exasperated Mr. Bangs, and finally defeated him. The trial . . . was without pecuniary benefit to either counsel, each giving his time, his labors, and, in the case of one, his life, for the discharge of what he deemed a public duty. Mr. Bangs was a sick man during the trial and its incidents and exactions hastened his end."

Although the wit of Francis N. Bangs would appear to have impressed his legal contemporaries mostly as a sharp and acute weapon, there is evidence that in his private rela-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

tions it found more genial manifestations. "To me nothing has ever been more interesting," wrote Theron G. Strong, "than certain occasions when both of us happened to be in the city on a summer day, and at his suggestion we would find ourselves in his light road-wagon behind a team of fleet-steppers, speeding along in the late afternoon through Central Park, and thence up the road leading to Highbridge and beyond, having left the cares of professional life behind us. . . . Generally the humorous element predominated and he was full of witty observations on passing events, and recitals of ludicrous occurrences, which only find their counterpart in the productions of his gifted son. He was one of the worst drivers I have ever known . . . and I could not help at times remonstrating with him that his driving was at the risk of our necks. . . . After dinner at one of the road-houses we would return in the early evening as we had come and, notwithstanding the risks to which his driving exposed us, the delight of intimate intercourse with this brilliant man induced me to willingly assume them." And further: "No one who attended it," said Strong, "would ever forget a reception given by the Association of the Bar to the Supreme Court of the United States during Mr. Bangs's presidency of the Association. In the course of the evening when the attendance was at its height, Mr. Bangs made a rather informal address, largely, I think, on the spur of the moment, but which for wit and brilliancy I have never heard equalled."

## *Growing Up to Manhood*

Here, at the pinnacle of professional success, we leave Francis N. Bangs, and turn to contemporary activities of his son at Columbia College. In these activities some of the genial and some of the caustic qualities of the elder Bangs find a clear and determinate echo.

ACTA COLUMBIANA:  
*COLLEGIALE VITUPERATOR*

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS entered Columbia in the autumn of 1879 at the age of seventeen. During his college years he won acclaim in the intercollegiate world through the instrumentality of the *Acta Columbiana*, an undergraduate periodical which enjoyed a conspicuous place in the collegiate journalism of its time. "Illustrious" is the term used by Frank Luther Mott, in his monumental *History of American Magazines*, 1938, to characterize the *Acta*. "The *Acta* should have a niche of its own in the hall of fame for collegiate journalism," he says. "Under Harry Thurston Peck in 1879-80, under Nicholas Murray Butler (known as the 'Acta Fiend') in 1880-81, and especially under John Kendrick Bangs in 1882-83, it was a gem of purest ray serene. Here Bangs won his first reputation as a humorous author, and under the names of Shakespeare Jones and T. Carlyle Smith ('the Great Collegiate Vituperator') he

## *Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

wrote pieces that not only gave flavor and charm to one of the best of college magazines, but were widely quoted in the general press." In his rôle of T. Carlyle Smith, the Collegiate Vituperator, and in his less satirical contributions to the *Acta*, Bangs reflected those qualities both caustic and genial which we have shown to be the possession of his father.

The world which the *Acta* represented was that of the old Columbia College located at 49th Street and Madison Avenue. The college buildings were described by a Yale paper as "an unutterable looking pile," and the writings of Bangs himself corroborate the Yale view. Describing his *Alma Mater* in its city setting on a calm spring day in the month of October, Bangs says:

Off on the far-distant horizon the musty walls of Columbia College might be seen, raising themselves in all their majesty and punk to the starry heavens. To the left of these mighty buildings was the lofty St. Patrick's Cathedral, while on the right, in close proximity, the massive dome of the Beer Brewery loomed up before the onlooker, giving forth that sweetly perfumed smoke which carries so much pleasure to the thirsty collegian.

This murky description of Columbia is taken from a story entitled "His First Dress Suit, a (Coat) Tale of the Nineteenth Century," being an early contribution of T. Carlyle Smith to the *Acta*. Along about November of the same year,

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

1881, Bangs was further moved to set down impressions of the life about him — this time under the name of Shakespeare Jones. Consumed by a desire to see an institution which could harbor such a person as T. Carlyle Smith, Shakespeare Jones visited Columbia. He wrote his impressions to Miss Mag of Vassar, and among them described the chapel and the chapel exercises:

The chapel building is very fine. It would make a superb stable. The ceiling was marvellous in its simplicity, being frescoed all over with a thin coat of white-wash, and at the lower end is a massive pillar which supports the upper floor. . . . The exercises were immense. The service was opened by the classes saluting each other with volleys of hymn-books. After that, an organ near the entrance struck up a chant, which was sung by two tall, lean, lank-looking fellows, who constituted the choir. In the middle of the chant a hand-organ in the street began playing "My Mary Ann," and an engine on the railroad nearby commenced to toot. This seemed to amuse the students, and the rest of the chant resembled a laughing chorus.

Such sketches of the physical and spiritual splendor of Columbia in the early eighties by Smith and Jones, should not create the impression that Columbia was alone in her glory. Yale was then known as a leading gymnasium with some intellectual leanings and was becoming nationally famous for her football achievements. T. Carlyle Smith

*Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

draws an imperishable picture of a Yale team and its cohorts en route for a game with Columbia:

On a cool, clear day in the month of November, an elevated railroad train might be seen slowly moving along the outskirts of Central Park, on its way to the festive Harlem. On the last car of this train were gathered a joyful band of young men, whose peculiar exhibition of cheek, blue ribbons, and, to say the least, peculiar manners, at once showed them to be Yale students. There were about twenty-five of them. All were clad in the most fashionable attire, except thirteen or fourteen who had on dark brown corduroy knicker-bockers, canvas shirts and dark blue caps. They are readily recognized as the Football Team of Yale College.

Yale won the game on this occasion by one goal, but apparently not without some trouble — for, said the *Acta Columbiana* editorially: “ We regret the tendency to fight at our game with Yale last Wednesday. We nevertheless feel justified in saying that considerable credit should be given to our men for restraining themselves as much as they did; for the Yale men, by their brutal mode of playing and rather questionable treatment of our men, were certainly exasperating enough to excuse a ‘ knock-down blow ’ here and there.” After witnessing a number of football games that autumn, Bangs submitted through the *Acta* a new set of rules to the Intercollegiate Football Association, suggesting

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

among other things that a match should be decided by the number of bones broken — one dead man to count according to his bones.

But Columbia's extracurricular activities have never been entirely devoted to athletics, and Bangs does not appear to have done much in that way himself. True, he once acted as an assistant clerk of the course in an intercollegiate meet when the greatest surprise of the day was Columbia's loss of the bicycle race to Harvard; and he once ran the mile in an interclass meet. In the mile race there were two entries, Bangs coming in second, his time not recorded. Bangs also served as secretary of the Columbia College Boat Club and in that capacity got mixed up in a sharp epistolary broil with the Harvard University Boat Club, an encounter which was athletic only intellectually. In fact, Bangs was one of the intellectual lights of the Columbia of his day, and, when new buildings were rising on the campus and darkening the office of the *Acta*, that periodical could announce that, were it not for the well-known brilliancy of one of its editors, it would be compelled to order a set of chandeliers.

There were no adequate courses in English Literature at Columbia in these years, and what knowledge Bangs gained of the masters of English he derived from his own reading, and from a trip to England in the summer of 1880, when he visited Warwickshire, Abbotsford, the Lake country, and other spots famous in literary history. He says that he read

## *Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

for the most part English novelists and American romancers, "loving Dickens, admiring Thackeray, reveling in Bulwer, rejoicing in Hawthorne, and finding a certain morbid enchantment in Poe." So enchanted was he by Poe that his whole career might have been directed to the production of tales of an uncanny or unwholesome cast had not other influences intervened. One thing which swerved him from an excessive indulgence in the morbid and the weird was his association with the *Acta Columbiana*.

Writing for the *Acta* required that he be sportive rather than solemn. As the paper was issued on alternate Wednesdays, the demand for sportiveness was fairly constant. So much time did Bangs devote to *Acta* that it was always a wonder to him that Columbia granted him his degree on Commencement Day, 1883. Whatever the truth may be, he always suspected that Dean Van Amringe gave him his degree against the wishes of the Faculty. Some twenty-five years after his graduation he expressed this belief in a poem entitled "Van Am," which he read before a distinguished gathering of Columbia alumni at the Waldorf-Astoria, April 3, 1909, at a dinner tendered Dean Van Amringe in celebration of the fiftieth year of his teaching at Columbia. The poem evoked an extraordinary appreciation on all sides, for it was read amid cheers, groans, and laughter, and the Dean, in a letter of thanks, spoke of it as original, witty, grave, humorous, serene, tender, gay, and altogether delightful. Edward S. Martin, himself a Harvar-

*John Kendrick Bangs*

dian practitioner in this field of postprandial poesy, considered Bangs's "Van Am," the high-watermark of this sort of thing in American literary history. From its closing section we quote verses which may be considered autobiographical:

Who, when I came a Freshman meek,  
A sort of sciolistic Greek,  
Was first a pleasant word to speak?  
Van Am!

Who, when I couldn't tell him why  
X equalled Z plus minus Y  
Raged — with a twinkle in his eye?  
Van Am!

Who flunked me ever with a face  
So genial I ne'er felt disgrace,  
But rather that I owned the place?  
Van Am!

Who, when a footless facultee  
Declined to give me my A.B.  
Went out and got the same for me?  
Van Am!

Let others have their high degrees,  
Their handles to their name;  
Their P.H.Q.s and LL.D.s  
To prove them men of fame.

*Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

Seize on the poor old alphabet  
And let it trail behind,  
So that a watching world may get  
The measure of your mind.

But bring no letters vain to me  
To deck my autograph.  
I seek no gaudy Ph.D.  
Or other parchment chaff;  
But let me have writ 'neath my name,  
All free from hollow sham,  
In characters of living flame —  
O.K.

*Van Am.*

In the spring of 1881 there had appeared in the *Acta* the anonymous "Smintheus in New Haven," a satire by Harry Thurston Peck, which caused the *Yale News* and the *Yale Courant* to excommunicate from their exchange files the Columbia paper. When college reopened in the autumn, the writings of Bangs's pseudonymous alias T. Carlyle Smith caused the *Rutgers Targum* to remark that the "collegiate vituperator" had commenced again. There followed a continuing series of satires, signed by Smith, which quickly showed Bangs outdoing Peck in celebrity if not in acerbity. These satires were upon such subjects as "Peter of Princeton," "Gravy H. Gruell of the *Yale Courant*," "Excitement at Vassar," "An Amherst Man," or, merely, "Cornell!" They created a tempest in the tea-pot of the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

intercollegiate world, arousing therein much controversy and comment in verse and prose. In pleasant anticipation of Smith's death, the *Racine Mercury* printed the following epitaph:

Here lies a man of rudest power,  
Whose rudeness yet provoked a smile,  
He served to pass a pleasant hour.  
His name was Smith, — Yes, T. Carlyle.  
Of all the Smiths that mother earth  
Has in the ages given birth,  
He was the one of noblest worth.

In far-off Hanover, New Hampshire, the satire of the *Acta* appears to have wounded sore, for of the ubiquitous J.K.B. *The Dartmouth* said: “The Exchange Editor of the *Acta Columbiana* flies at his contemporaries in a manner unbecoming the respectability of a border ruffian. . . .” To this onslaught the *Acta* good-naturedly retorted that as a paperweight *The Dartmouth* was in its glory, and that on looking at its green cover one always felt like giving three cheers for Ireland. *The Princetonian* took a happier attitude than *The Dartmouth*, saying that “hitting hard, cutting deep and wounding sore, T. Carlyle still manages to avoid all meanness, and retains the good wishes of those he may hit the hardest.” Even Yale got over its earlier irritability at Peck and treated Bangs with a more genial antipathy. In a playlet dealing with the ancient legend of Beauty and the Beast, the *Yale Courant* pictured Bangs as

## *Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

the Beast and characterized him as “the master word-contortionist”; and in 1883 the *Yale News* could print the item: “The Exchange Editor of the *Acta*, J.K.B., has at last laid down his pen. The charm of originality has never left his column.” The *Harvard Daily Herald* thought so much of Smith as to add T. Carlyle to its staff as special correspondent for Columbia affairs.

In the Christmas holidays of 1882, the Intercollegiate Press Association was organized at a meeting in Hamilton Hall, Columbia College, and Bangs was elected its first president. He was the prime mover in the creation of the association, and it was but natural that he should be chosen its first head, despite *The Dartmouth*’s pronouncement that “the calm judgment of respectable collegians must condemn an editor who will degrade not only himself but his college in so far as he is its representative, by descending to the low ribaldry in which the *Acta* indulges.” But the general calm judgment seems not to have wholly coincided with the Hanoverian dictum. It is true that Dartmouth and Yale sent no delegates to the meeting, and that the delegates from Princeton, Harvard, Williams, Brown, Michigan, Amherst, *et al.*, proved to be anything but unanimous in their choice, they having brought about a tie vote, which was broken in favor of Bangs when the *Vassar Miscellany* cast its vote by proxy. Vassar had been too modest to send a delegate and had authorized J. K. Bangs to act as its proxy, with instructions to cast the ballot for himself.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

The *Williams Athenaeum* printed a cartoon of “Bohnny K. Jangs” as “The Cerberus of the *Acta*,” a title conferred upon Bangs by the *Harvard Crimson*. The cartoon was in the likeness of a large dog with six heads, each head representing an alias of the protean Bangs — for as well as using the pseudonymns of Smith and Jones, Bangs manifested himself under such lesser guises as “Dingus,” “Chubbins,” and “Snipee.” Fortunately one collegiate editor has set down for us the impression that the great Smith made upon him when once “he looked up as suddenly as if someone had hit him upon the back of the neck and saw — ah! what a vision! — in a doorway *that form* and, just beyond, a crowd of awestruck students whispering ‘T is he! It’s Carlyle Smith.’ He saw a thin, willowy form, in which legs preponderated. The God-like form was clad in a pair of skin-tight trousers of the loudest and most pronounced check pattern, and the trembling editor’s gaze noted two sanguinary pistol pockets. The vest touched his chin and a ‘see-more’ coat fell in graceful folds over the noble back. Beginning where the coat ended the rest of his apparel was half-soled, showing that he had come on business. His hair was parted in the middle and was brushed flat until it shone like an old pair of pants. Crowning this magnificence sat a Derby hat of minutest design. A rose adorned his button-hole, and his presence shed a fragrance through the room.”

On reading this description of the Great Vituperator, we can better appreciate the relief felt by *The Dartmouth*

## *Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

when it could at last say: "The author of much of the scurility which has disgraced the *Acta Columbiana* the past year has laid down his pen and stepped out."

But, in laying down his pen and stepping out, Bangs concocted the following apology for his seemingly vituperative acts:

For the last time the present Exchange Editor of the *Acta* takes up his well-worn pen to pay his respects to his esteemed friends of the college press. Much to his regret he can foresee very little grief at his departure. When he assumed control . . . it was the height of his ambition to write Exchange Notes which should be read, and he may be pardoned if he flatters himself that they have been. If you do not believe it, O ye skeptic, cast your eyes over the pages of the one-hundred odd exchanges which come week after week into our sanctum, and although you will not obtain from some of them a very high opinion of the writer's reputation as a gentleman, they will convince you that in many instances the morsels of brain food emanating from this department have been read, marked and inwardly digested, the last very often with considerable difficulty.

As to his own contributions to the *Acta*, Bangs frankly confessed that as specimens of collegiate literature they had many shortcomings. He admitted that among the exchanges he had a large number of kind but not indulgent critics, who took care that when he erred he should find it out; but

*John Kendrick Bangs*

The best of friends must part  
And we must separate us,  
Although it breaks our heart,  
The loving apparatus.

For some of you I drop a tear;  
For others I do not;  
For some to me were very dear;  
The rest can go to pot.

I've tried my best a few to whack,  
And others to amuse;  
At last I go! I turn my back.  
Kind friends, my last adieux.

J.K.B

Before dismissing the vituperative aspects of the *Acta*, it were well that we should have an inkling as to how all the rumpus began as far as Bangs was concerned. Harry A. Garfield, one-time editor in chief of the *Williams Athenaeum*, has supplied us with a hint. He writes:

At that time Samuel V. V. Holmes, the late honored and respected Pastor of Westminster Church, Buffalo, was Editor-in-Chief of our publication. Neither the *Acta Columbiana* nor the *Williams Athenaeum* were prospering too well on the financial side and Bangs and Dr. Holmes, obviously then not Doctor of anything, cooked up a plan to secure additional subscriptions. It consisted in this — that one should attack the other as violently as possible and that the other should come back with stout blows well laid on. The plan worked

*Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

and the two publications, backed by their enthusiastic subscribers, fought the good fight to a substantial financial finish.

Apparently, the war once started, the collegiate press in general was drawn into the battle.

The major portion of Bangs's contributions to the *Acta* were not, however, productions sympathetic or antipathetic to other colleges. Bangs's collegiate writings reflect all manner of things, a miscellany exceedingly comprehensive, running the gamut from "A Climb and Its Results," the sad tale of the disappointed love of Fitzaltamount De O'Shaughnessy for Theodosia Amaranthus Ennis in the summer setting of the White Mountains, all the way to a painful narrative setting forth the pathetic degeneration of J. Ashbarrel Guttersnipe, as disclosed in "The Downward Path." There are editorial episodes, co-educational tales, vivid portrayals of Columbia College in Anno Domini 2000. One may meet with a typical collegiate pest in "A Book Agent," get a lively picture of the old custom of New Year calling in "Dingus's New Year"; or, if one be interested in astronomy, he can easily discover in "The Transit of Venus" how excitement ran about ten flights high at Columbia on December 6, 1882, when the Goddess of Beauty gave her centennial transit across the heavens in the presence of an enthusiastic audience, in size even greater than that which greeted the celebrated Lily Langtry on her then recent first-night performance in New York.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

There were many verses of the Gilbertian sort scattered through the pages of the *Acta*. One of these might be taken as self-descriptive:

A HUMOROUS-editor-man,  
A slugging-ink-slinging young man,  
A super-athletical,  
Also poetical,  
Rolling-his-eyes young man.

Bangs appears to have particularly revered Gilbert. *Patience* had been produced September 1881 in New York. Its central figure, Bunthorne, then supposedly a satiric picture of Oscar Wilde as the Apostle of Aestheticism, aroused an interest which was intensified when Wilde himself arrived on American shores, remarking on his disappointment with the Atlantic Ocean. That the *Acta* might be in style, Bangs reviewed Wilde's recently published book of poems under the caption "Oscar's Little Book," not greatly appreciating its strains of "unsung songs" and "unkissed kisses." As a result of Wilde's visit, rashes of aestheticism broke out. "All Vassar is crushed over him," reported T. Carlyle Smith; and in describing an "Aesthetic Party" given for Wilde by Shaky's sister Miss Jones at Batkins Flat, Smith tells of how he clothed himself in the garb of Oscar with the result that Oscar fled from him "with a sad kirtled sigh and an anxious fawn-like expression of his dilating retina."



TINTYPE OF BANGS AS T. CARLYLE SMITH,  
COLLEGIATE VITUPERATOR



## Acta Columbiana: *Collegiate Vituperator*

In contrast to the Wilde Aesthete and his meretricious product, Bangs appears to have admired the work of the newly-risen American wit, Eugene Field. Here and there in the pages of the *Acta* is a “Freshman Primer,” facilely imitative of Field’s now famous *Tribune Primer*, published from Denver in 1882. Field was at this time the most notable of our humorists of the daily press then in process of evolving into *columnists*. By 1883 he had established his “Sharps and Flats” in the *Chicago Daily News*, and by the excellence of his style was putting newspaper humor upon the classical plane. One of Bangs’s earliest and anonymous contributions to the new comic weekly *Life* in the spring of 1883 was a brief burlesque of Field’s then much-quoted “Little Peach.” The Bangs version ran:

A little peach in an orchard grew  
Of emerald hue — so rare.  
Our baby on that peach did chew  
And climbed the golden stair.

In the American lighter verse of this period a strong tide of French verse-forms arose in emulation of the delicate work then being done in the same field in England by such poets as Austin Dobson, Edmund Gosse, and Andrew Lang. In this country H. C. Bunner was doing the same thing in the pages of *Puck*, and there was a good deal of collegiate enterprise in the same direction, notably at Columbia in the verse of Harry Thurston Peck and Frank Dempster Sher-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

man, a practice which gave them even in their undergraduate days a modicum of national repute. Bangs also tried his hand at rondeaux, rondels, and triolets, but generally preferred to express himself in the forms of more simple issue. He satirizes the French forms in the triolet:

This valentine,  
It cost one cent;  
The cent was mine;  
The valentine  
Just now is thine,  
And is one sent —  
This valentine  
That cost one cent.

Customarily, as in later years, Bangs's verses followed easier and more natural forms, being essentially artless and spontaneous utterances untongue-tied by externally imposed pattern. The leap of spring in Harlem Heights, then known as Goatsville, is instinct in his little poem "Beware of the Goat" in such stanzas as:

The birdlet on the treeling  
Now carols forth his notelet,  
The boy that hath no feeling  
Ties tin cans to the goatlet.

What then? The spring is here  
In palace and in hutlet;  
The goat doth get upon his ear,  
And gives that boy a butt-let.

## *Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

This sprightly celebration of springtide was copied in the *Harvard Crimson* with proper credit to the *Acta*, and then appeared in *Life* falsely accredited to the *Crimson*, thence suddenly to appear like a humming bird in the periodical press in various sections of the country.

Another example of Bangs's dexterous verse, exhibiting in this case satire of no mean power in small compass and reflecting the Yankee style of Lowell, appeared in *Life*, in June 1883, about the time of his graduation from Columbia. It dealt with a question of wide public interest at the moment: Would Harvard University confer the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws upon Benjamin Franklin Butler, newly elected governor of Massachusetts? Harvard had never before failed to confer this degree upon governors of its native state, but Butler was considered a demagogue flirting with the horny-handed sons of toil and there was much excitement over what Harvard would do. Harvard did just what was prophesied by Bangs's verses — verses widely copied throughout the land in papers ranging from the *San Francisco Argonaut* to the home press of Boston:

### UVAE ACIDULOSAE

Cock-eyed Benjamin Franklin B.  
Got awfully left on his LL.D.;  
An honor conferred by the Harvard Trustee  
On Govs. elected annuallee.  
But Ben didn't mind. " You know," sezee,  
" When it's scooped by a man like Rutherford B.,

*John Kendrick Bangs*

Or the President-ex, Ulysses S. G.,  
"Tis a barren and empty LL. Degree,  
Not worth a tinker's D-D-D,

To me,"  
Sezee.

J.K.B.

Bangs has also described for us with observing eye the 128th Commencement at Columbia, in June 1882, in which we see the graduating Nicholas Murray Butler at the top of his class — where he has remained forever since and become probably the most widely honored intellect of his time:

After the prayer Mr. Nicholas Murray Butler delivered a Greek Salutatory Poem, which was written in a very fluent style, and delivered with a grace which would have caused Demosthenes to commit suicide. Mr. Butler's humorous allusions were well received by the Faculty, who were placed in a position to appreciate them, but to us in the rear portion of the building, naturally enough, they were all Greek. After Mr. Butler had repeated his rhymes several times, he went to the side of the stage, and picking up a half-dozen baskets of flowers, made his exit as gracefully as his gown would permit.

Bangs, too, may be said to have had his dignified moments. He had twice been elected vice-president of his class, and on Class Day he was its Presentation Orator. His speech on that occasion was reported by his friend and

*Acta Columbiana: Collegiate Vituperator*

class-mate A. V. Williams Jackson to have been a masterpiece of bright humor and witty jest, a memorable incident in the Commencement festivities. Bangs was graduated from the School of Political Science of Columbia in June 1883, and entered the larger world with the cherished O.K. of Van Am on his Ph.B. parchment, having in his four undergraduate years advanced far from that possible day when, as he has himself limericked it:

There was a young freshman, urbane,  
To Columbia came, with a cane,  
But a soph took the stick  
And that freshie did lick —  
Which astonished that freshman, with pain.

*H. C. BUNNER*

*LECTURES J. K. BANGS*

**B**ANGS, on leaving academic walls, did not enter the larger world wholly unheralded. *Life* at the time of his graduation from Columbia was already advertising him as among its regular contributors, and *Puck* almost immediately greeted him with a salute which was anything but applaudive. To *Puck* Bangs had contributed anonymously — for the fun of it — while writing for the *Acta Columbiana*, and sometimes over the signatures “Jake” and “T.C.S.” In fact, as early as November 16, 1881, when Bangs was nineteen, we find T.C.S. maintaining *Puck*’s reputation for distinctness of rhythm and exactitude of rhyme by such verses as:

A man who lived out in Dun D  
Remarked that he never could C  
A good reason Y  
A yellow cat’s I  
So extended at midnight should B.

## *H. C. Bunner Lectures J. K. Bangs*

But despite these clandestine contributions to *Puck* and the advertising of his name by *Life*, J. K. Bangs was in June 1883 totally unknown to *Puck*'s brilliant and celebrated young editor, Henry Cuyler Bunner. And when J. K. Bangs first appeared *in propria persona* in the pages of *Puck*, he appeared there not as a welcome contributor, but as a newly discovered subject for castigation by Bunner's moralizing pen.

This castigation of Bangs was the result of Bunner's amazement at the fact that such a thing as the *Acta Columbi-a* existed. One of Bangs's last acts of doubtful virtue while yet he remained an undergraduate was the perpetration of an issue of the *Acta* written wholly by himself. It was to be the final act of his ink-slinging career before he settled down to the arduous study of the law, for which his father had destined him. This issue of the *Acta*, concocted with more hilarity than wisdom, came, by chance, to the solemn editorial sanctum of *Puck*, and Bunner was not favorably impressed. Under the caption "A Little Lecture," August 1, 1883, he declared his surprise that boys in college should print a paper for themselves, and he suggested that there existed in this country, and in Europe, excellent journals quite good enough even for seniors at Columbia. Furthermore, students were sent to college to learn, he averred, and not to edit little papers. He confessed that he had never before heard of Mr. J. K. Bangs. "But it is our duty to tell him," said Bunner, "that he is making a

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

mistake in trying to edit a paper before he has served an apprenticeship to the profession of journalism."

Bunner then expressed his regret that the other contributors to the *Acta* affected pretty much the same style as Bangs. "There is one young gentleman," he said, "who signs himself 'T. Carlyle Smith,' and who has an article based on the delicate conceit that he is in Hell." And he objected also to the silly and unmannerly work of another youth who wrote under the assumed name of "Dingus." Bunner thought it particularly unfortunate that the *Acta* should have reported a convivial party from which at the time of going to press the freshmen and sophomores had not yet recovered. "If this is the truth," exclaimed Bunner, "it is disgraceful. Nobody should get drunk; nobody, having got drunk, should be proud of it, and very young men should not drink intoxicating liquors at all." Then, with the suggestion that President Barnard would do well to point out to his young charges a more profitable way in which to occupy their time than in publishing a very childish imitation of a paper, Bunner, aged twenty-seven, ended his sermon upon the hope that the Columbia boys would grow up sensible and useful young men.

Bunner's well-delivered lecture evoked from its recipient a reply which apparently contained some genial ingredients of its own. In *Puck*, August 22, under "More Lecture," Bunner announced that he had received a letter from Mr. J. K. Bangs, who would seem to have taken great umbrage

## *H. C. Bunner Lectures J. K. Bangs*

at his admonitions. Bunner regretted that he could not print Mr. Bangs's nine pages of withering sarcasm, but he condensed their substance to the effect that Mr. Bangs did not like *Puck*, that the editor of *Puck* could not read Latin, that Mr. Bangs once sent some stamps to *Puck*, which were feloniously detained in the *Puck* office, that the students of Columbia went on "bats" but did not get "drunk," and that Mr. Bangs thought that "intoxicated" was a better word for a polished journalist than was "drunk." Bunner tersely informed Mr. Bangs that no journalist is so polished that the English speech is not good enough for him. He expressed sorrow that Mr. Bangs should have taken his "Little Lecture" in such an unwise spirit.

Bunner then launched an attack upon our educational institutions in general, citing the utter lack of moral or social discipline amongst them. He referred to the infantile antics of the typical collegians of the day, and called attention to the notoriously rowdy behavior of Yale men in New Haven and to the youths of Columbia shrieking their unpleasant cheer through the midnight streets of New York. Since he had commented on the *Acta*, he said he had received among other papers a large file of the *Columbia Spectator*, which he thought a feeble but well-meaning little sheet, and he ended his second sermon with a warning to the colleges as public trusts to have a care and to mend their ways.

The strictures laid upon Bangs, Smith, Dingus & Com-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

pany by the fastidious Bunner were probably deserved. Bunner was a literary artist, a maker of exquisite literary *negligée*, triolets on mignonette and rondeaux on sea shells; and the brusque style of the Columbia local-colorist must have been almost as shocking to his ears as some of the colored cartoons in *Puck* should have been to his eyes. Bunner was a serious man — a sober man — and he did not like to see J. K. Bangs and Carlyle Smith and the other Columbia boys — not even Dingus — wasting their academic opportunities.

Bunner had wanted to go to Columbia himself, but misfortune had deprived him of the great privilege, and, at the age of twenty-two, he had become editor of *Puck*. He had followed a hard road. He had made *Puck* a success, and now, after six years of sober enterprise, it worried him to think of college boys wasting their fathers' money and their own time in editing little papers. But were college boys wasting their time editing their little papers before they had served an apprenticeship to the profession of journalism? Serving an apprenticeship to journalism was just what these boys *were* doing. And at the very time of Bunner's lectures to Bangs, the new periodical *Life* was clearly enough proving the fact. Taking its cue from the college papers, which Bunner affected to despise, *Life* was notably coming forward as America's leading comic weekly. Among the university wits who had proved their capacities for producing comic copy of quality while serving their

*H. C. Bunner Lectures J. K. Bangs*

apprenticeship on college journals was Bangs himself, who was by far the most versatile and fertile contributor to *Life* during its formative years, and, as its literary editor from 1884 to 1888, its most conspicuous journalistic representative.

*HUMORS OF LIFE:  
ANTICAL MANHATTANER*

BANGS'S first association with John Ames Mitchell, the founder of *Life*, came through his work for the *Acta Columbiana*. It was at Gillis Brothers, the printing establishment from which both *Life* and the *Acta* were published, that Bangs first met Mitchell. Since Mitchell was a tyro at editing, Bangs, who had been editing the *Acta* for a year, was able to assist him in getting out the first issue of *Life*, January 4, 1883. So it was that Bangs assisted at the birth of *Life*, and in the same friendly capacity aided Mitchell with subsequent issues. Although Mitchell was seventeen years Bangs's senior, a deep friendship developed. Bangs believed that Mitchell gave him his first intimation that "good humor was good-humored, and that underneath humor must lie something in the nature of serious thinking."

The founding of *Life* marks the coming of the University Wits to the field of American Comic Journalism. John

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

Ames Mitchell, himself a Harvard man, selected as his first associate editor Edward S. Martin, a founder of the *Harvard Lampoon*. Other graduates of the *Lampoon* staff associated with *Life* in its earliest days were Frederic J. Stimson, Robert Grant, J. T. Wheelwright, and F. G. Attwood, illustrator. Columbia furnished, in addition to Bangs, such early contributors as Brander Matthews, F. D. Sherman, poet of the *Acta*, and H. L. Satterlee, editor of the *Columbia Spectator*. Columbia also supplied two of *Life*'s earliest illustrators, W. H. Hyde and Henry W. McVickar. It was McVickar who inaugurated the new school of society drawing in America out of which evolved Charles Dana Gibson. Among Princeton wits contributing to *Life* were W. J. Henderson and Robert Bridges. Bridges, over the name of "Droch," wrote *Life*'s book reviews for seventeen years. The scholarly Henry A. Beers, former editor of the *Yale Literary Magazine*, added his humors to those supplied by this galaxy.

Bangs's major work on *Life* began in the spring of 1884, when he joined the staff as assistant editor. The course of his development from Collegiate Vituperator to Antical Manhattaner — as he was dubbed in the late eighties — was by this connection much facilitated. *Life* was to prove an ideal cocoon wherein Bangs's budding wings might imp themselves for flight. Between leaving college and joining the staff of *Life*, he had studied law in his father's office and at the Columbia Law School, but all the while he had

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

been unhappy in it. His fingers had itched for pen and paper, and during this brief "legal interval" he could not restrain himself from contributing paragraphs and verses to several periodicals — including *Puck*; for Bunner now smiled affable approval upon some of the erstwhile vituperator's jocosities. Bunner and Bangs had met and become friends. To *Life*, also, Bangs had continued his contributions with such fertility that Mitchell had asked him to join the staff.

Edward S. Martin, because of illness, had retired from *Life* about April 1883, and was not again to take up editorial work for it until the close of the eighties. He had been succeeded in the associate editorship by Henry Guy Carleton. Martin said Carleton was probably the most irresponsible editor ever known; but his articles did much to amuse *Life's* readers. While Carleton was still associate editor, Mitchell called Bangs in as assistant, to take over some of the responsibilities which Carleton neglected. Shortly thereafter, when Carleton broke away to become a playwright, Bangs assumed the associate editorship, and for four years he had charge of the literary content of the paper. During these years Bangs contributed largely to *Life's* columns, wrote certain pages each week, and was responsible for many of the longer articles. It was Mitchell's policy to meet each week with Bangs and the cartoonist, usually William A. Rogers, to discuss the cartoons in advance, a valuable exercise for the young associate.

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

It has been remarked that great assiduity is a thing almost incompatible with humorous writing, and contributors to comic papers have been divided into two classes, the brilliant ones and the reliable ones. Mitchell found that Bangs combined both classes. Bangs's assiduity was beyond question. Martin described him as "a jocund intelligence backed by remarkable energy of mind and body." Bangs was an enormous worker. He was characterized as prolific. It may fairly be said that during the years of his editorship *Life*, as far as its literary aspect was concerned, bore the stamp of his mind more than that of any other — always with the reservation that that yet-formative mind was considerably influenced by the presiding genius of *Life*, Mitchell himself.

*Life* was a mirror brightly and crisply reflecting the doings of the day. It was greeted by critics of the press as fresh, vigorous, gentlemanly, genial, and satisfying. It stood with the Prayer Book, that man who is born of woman has but a short time to live and is full of misery, but it believed in the principle of alleviation, announcing, in the words of Martin, that "Fun is very good for men, and, provided it is of the right sort, the more they have of it, the better." Mitchell drew for the picture-head of his editorial page a horseman with *Life* for shield and with quill for lance, pricking fast upon the bat-winged figure of fleeing Melancholy. *Life* had no policy save to be human and to maintain itself in the center of sanity. Its motto was

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

simply *Americanus sum*. It had no wish to appear sophisticated. It indulged in wit-snapping, and allowed for mere sportiveness and ingenious trifling. Its wit and raillery were largely amiable. It lampooned social and religious follies more with geniality than with sarcasm; but it did not hesitate to use invective when sham and pretense invited attack. Mitchell “hated cruelty and pretense and all bogus infallibilities.” Without any claim to perfection for itself, *Life* used the power of its Comic Spirit to carry on the good fight, as Mitchell said, “for Justice, Cheerfulness and Charity.” It became for America the leading comic journal of its periodical generation. Said Agnes Repplier, 1894: “*Life* does more to quicken charity, and to purify social corruption than all the religious and ethical journals in the country. This is the natural result of its reaching the proper audience.” *Life* was born at a time when American society could furnish such an audience and when American culture had reached a state in which the Comic Spirit might thrive. James L. Ford said that it was the reflection of fashionable life as never before shown in a comic paper that made *Life* popular from the start.

The social satire which *Life* practised was not entirely new to America. It was kin in nature to sporadic precursors such as *The Potiphar Papers*, 1853, of George William Curtis, or the *Nothing to Wear*, 1857, of William Allen Butler. Both these writers, though they satirized society not through the pages of a comic weekly, struck at the Gallo-

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

mania of the social life of their times as did *Life* at the Anglomania of its own. In the "Elegant Eighties" American super-Society began aping on the grand scale the more sensational actions and conduct of the British Aristocracy. This super-Society, the so-called "Four Hundred" — actually not so designated until 1889 — was sufficiently cultivated to be amused at its own follies. It enjoyed, save on exceptional occasions, the reflection of itself in the pages of *Life*, as did a larger clientele of readers who were less superfluously blest. Writing of this period many years later, Bangs said:

We got our fashions from the Prince of Wales,  
In collars, hats, and coats, and swallow-tails,  
And bred a harmless creature called a Dude,  
Who gave much pleasure to the multitude.

Here we purpose to give some record of the humors of *Life* in the mid-eighties to recapture the spirit of that time as it most probably impressed itself on Bangs. Bangs once remarked that while he was editing *Life* he was a constant reader of it, and there can be no doubt that the reflection of the eighties in *Life*'s pages, both in picture and in text, largely coincided with his own view. Our major emphasis will be upon the work of Bangs. We shall see how he seized upon current events and used them for the exercise of his comic faculties. As *Life*'s most voluminous provider of comic copy, he is conspicuously in evidence in its pages, in the open and in the corners. Much of his work is un-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

signed, and much that he writes appears over the name "Carlyle Smith." Bangs's style is not so refined and elegant as the styles of those who gave an air of polish and scholarship to the pages of *Life*. There was no sudden transformation from the "slugging-ink-slinging young man" of the *Acta*. Bangs, the Antical Manhattaner, does not lose the vulgar touch in the kaleidoscopic reflection of the Elegant Eighties.

*Life* did not limit itself to the social life of the gilded upper classes, but indulged the scope of its name. However, because New York Society seemed unduly eager to imitate the more flashy aspects of the British Aristocracy, *Life* constantly aimed its darts at the current Dude and other phases of Anglomania, from titled Fortune Hunters to home-bred Social Exhibitioners. As horses and high-class vehicles were then the outward show of the expensive, C. Gray Parker, skilled in the sketching of the equine and the elegant equipage, continuously portrayed the habits and postures of America's Nobs and Swells, their Postillions and, sometimes, their Posteriors. He threw double-pages of Newport before one's eyes, or pictured the Meadow Brook Hunt in action, to show *how jolly British it all was*.

McVickar and Hyde, and Albert Sterner, intimately acquainted with the subjects of which their pictures spoke, exhibited the *jeunesse dorée* in drawing-room, or at tennis, table, or dancing, the young men rather wanting in courtesy to the ladies, and very eager indeed to get to the punch-bowl

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

or the bottle. In summer J. A. Mitchell exhibited Society afield at Mount Desert — then “the wild east of fashion” — picturing lovelier aspects of swimming, courting, canoeing. Bangs, as Society Correspondent, reported on The Season at Noodleport, but gave equal celebration to Irish Society at Shantee-on-the-Rocks, Riverside Crag, or at Goat Cliff, Central Park West.

The Frequent Dude who strutted *Life*’s pages caused *Puck* to refer to its rival as Our Highly Esteemed Dude Contemporary, but *Life* was no snob. Just as its columns gave space to the Tipperarians, so also were the colored folk of the Thompson Street Poker Club continually celebrated by the combined talents of Guy Carleton and E. W. Kemble. James Whitcomb Riley’s “Serenade to Nora” was appropriately illustrated with an Irish Romeo by the intellectual Francis Gilbert Attwood; and another Irish Romeo appeared in not so happy a state in Bangs’s abrupt limerick:

Augustus Fitzgibbons Moran  
Fell in love with Maria McCann:  
With a yell and a whoop  
He cleared the front stoop  
Just ahead of her papa’s brogan.

W. J. Henderson, in an “Ode to England,” felt grateful, with a wink, for

Oscar Wilde, the exegetic,  
Priest of all that was aesthetic;

*John Kendrick Bangs*

Collars high from Piccadilly,  
And the fragrant Jersey Lily;

but, as we have seen, *Life* did not grovel and genuflect before the Briton. Oscar Wilde amused *Life*, as did the visiting Matthew Arnold: the one with his silliness, and the other with his superciliousness. Bangs, in 1885, when Wilde advocated the abolition of the coat and vest, suggested with some prescience that Oscar should be locked up in his room before he went any further.

As for Lily Langtry, *Life* spotted her at once as a school-girl actress. She had come on her first visit to this country “with a blare of trumpets as the idol of the Marlborough House coterie, jewelled with the especial favor of H. R. H. The Prince himself.” Yet *Life* was grateful for her beauty, and on her second visit opened its eyes widely when she adorned herself in gorgeous millinery and transformed herself into a theatrical bird of paradise. Moreover, *Life* sympathized deeply with His Royal Highness’s need of relaxation and play. The Prince at home with his Queen mother was not having an easy time of it, as is obvious from Bangs’s anonymous squib “Wet Weather at Windsor”:

There had been wet weather at Windsor Castle for two weeks, and Her Majesty, walking to the window, remarked: “What a long rain we’re having.”

“Yes,” said the Prince of Wales, sadly, “I don’t think you’ll get out for some time.” And then Her

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

Majesty looked at him as if she suspected him of a little too much double-entendreness.

Robert Bridges, in his department “Bookishness,” has much to say about William Dean Howells and the theories of realism which at this time he was consistently propounding. In 1886 Howells published a book of poems, and frankly admitted he could not read his own poetry. Bangs sympathized with him in a stanza:

But when on Pegasus you ride  
You scar him deep with rowells:  
Your songs degenerate from hymns  
To most unpleasant Howells!

*Life* found Howells in these days in a “very critical condition,” but this estimate was modified when Howells announced that he considered Boston the most interesting city in the world. Bridges’s criticism of the Howells realism still stands today. Of its exponents he said that they study perturbations and miss the grand sweep of the curve, while measuring with a micrometer its petty inequalities. Mrs. Howells is reported to have remarked, in an unguarded moment, that her husband wrote novels as a man saws wood.

As for Mark Twain, he had recently published his *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1884. Bridges reviewed the book under the heading “Mark Twain’s Blood-Curdling Humor” and found that E. W. Kemble’s one hundred and seventy-four illustrations enlivened many a page of coarse

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

and dreary fun. On the whole Bridges seems to have missed the boat in dealing with Mark Twain's masterpiece; but his strictures were in line with the "genteel" attitude — an attitude also maintained by the Library Committee of Concord, Massachusetts, which voted to banish *Huckleberry Finn* from the library shelves — possibly because, at about this juncture, the Concord School of Philosophy was debating the profound subject of Sleep.

From Bangs we learn:

Markus Twain is picking chestnuts  
In this lovely autumn weather,  
While the blizzards o'er the land begin to blow.  
Henry James is cursing fortune,  
In the midst of Scottish heather,  
That he really isn't English, dontcherknow.

Henry James had published *The Bostonians* in 1886, and Mark Twain remarked that he would rather be damned to John Bunyan's Heaven than read it. *Life* felt somewhat the same way, and wished that Henry James might at times sharpen his own point of view and then stick himself with it. Even Julia Ward Howe was getting weary of the airs "Henry" — as she called him — was putting on. Recently, when he had greeted her with a good deal of palaver, she had abruptly silenced him by interjecting: "Henry! Don't put on any airs with me!" And now, publicly, before the Concord School of Philosophy, she characterized the James

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

method as " minute and mean " and charged it with doing " immense damage to character."

Of the Concord School, where Mrs. Howe had made her attack on James and where Huck Finn was too noisy to be admitted into Speculations upon the Soporific, Bangs wrote:

At Concord the Philosophers  
Have very nearly got  
Down to the very essence of  
The Whichness of the What . . .

but he regretted that

None of them who worship and  
Dub Emerson a saint,  
Can clarify the clouds about  
The Notness of the Aint.

The Brahmins of Boston were dying off in these days. Longfellow and Emerson had crossed the bar in 1882, and, when *Life* came along, the main survivors of the Old School were James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Boston as a literary center was already in the sere and yellow leaf, and *Life* was one manifestation of a number of vigorous new literary movements in New York.

*Life* was not particularly reverential in its treatment of the Bostonians. At about this time Mr. Lowell was writing a poem for the *Pedantic Monthly* upon the materialistic

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

tendencies of the age and proclaiming that the “ grasshop-pahs next yeah may outnumbah the cattahpillahs by a largah majority than evah befoah ”; whereas Oliver Wendell Holmes in the same journal announced that he never got into a large and lofty saloon without feeling that he were a weak solution of himself, his personality almost drowned out in the flood of space about him. The pathetic picture which the little doctor here drew of himself in an expanding universe of which Boston was no longer the hub, led Bangs to suggest that he come to New York and try the Hoffman House saloon which would make “ two other men out of him.”

Reporters from Boston observed that Lowell had gone very British during his service as minister at Victoria’s Court, until the good democrat Cleveland had removed him in 1885. Lowell seemed to have lost the comic slant of his brilliant Yankee period of the *Biglow Papers*. Clinton Scollard, writing Bangs from Cambridge in 1887, describes Lowell’s lectures on the Old English Dramatists as “ simply *huge!* ” Over the European success of anything so indigenously American as Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show, Lowell appears to have grown sour.

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, which had first thrilled the East in 1883, conquered Europe in 1887. In England it was the year of the Queen’s Jubilee. There was a command performance, after which the Queen summoned Buffalo Bill, and met on equal terms Red Shirt, Chief of the Sioux

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

Nation. So great was Victoria's delight that she ordered a special performance for the Royal Guests who had come for her Jubilee. On this occasion, the famous Deadwood Coach, pursued by the Indians, contained four Crowned Heads of Europe, with the Prince of Wales on the driver's box next to Colonel Cody. The Colonel, speaking in poker terms, remarked: "I've held four kings, but four kings and the Prince of Wales makes a royal flush, and that's unprecedented." Lowell did not like Cody's success. He wrote to Professor Norton of Harvard: "I think the true key to this eagerness for lions — even of the poodle sort — is the dullness of the average English mind."

But *Life*, whose motto was *Americanus sum*, was thrilled with Cody's success. Carlyle Smith, as Correspondent from Foreign Fields, reported with gusto on "Buffalo Bill at Windsor," describing how, for the delectation of the Queen, Buffalo Bill gave a special representation of New York's first families on the way to church:

The old camp-wagon was brought out, and Mr. Cody, disguised as Mr. Vanastorbilt, stepped up on the box and started the horses off. Grace Church was represented by a canvas tent, and Fourteenth Street was shown by a pole stuck in the ground. The Queen could hardly restrain herself when the team ran away, and the nimble Buffalo Bill, tying a lasso around his waist, stopped them by casting a noose over a stump on which were growing some wistaria vines and which was supposed to represent a lamp-post. Her Majesty had

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

heard of Mr. Vanastorbilt, but never supposed he was so clever a man.

Then, as the carriage neared Fourteenth Street, the low, ominous war-cry of the Sioux Indians was heard, and the faithful picture of New York life that then followed, with its awful butchery and bellowing of buffaloes on Union Square, needs no description for your readers who have grown so familiar with it in the daily round of life. Suffice it to say that the British aristocracy fairly yelled with joy as Mr. Vanastorbilt slew file after file of the attacking party, losing only his scalp and four children in the mêlée.

Before the glamour of the Wild West Show fades, we must spend a moment with that other “Greatest Show on Earth,” Mr. P. T. Barnum and his Outfit. The greatest of all his attractions had been Jumbo, the largest elephant in captivity, who had been seen by sixteen millions of people before he heroically saved a baby elephant from being hit by a railroad train at the sacrifice of his own life. So great had Jumbo been, that on his death Bangs revised Shakespeare in his honor:

Imperious Jumbo, dead and stuffed for show,  
Might still suffice to make a circus go.

This little epitaph was reprinted even as far afield as *London Gaiety*. Speaking of Jumbo, *Life*, of course, did not neglect the humors of the animal kingdom. Palmer Cox did the most for that, with his delicious mice, bears, cats, and monkeys, not to mention an extraordinary “Bullfrog

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

of Bellevue" who responded picturesquely and entertainingly to electrical experimentation. For the animal kingdom, also, Aesop was frequently revised by G. T. Lanigan, and occasionally by Bangs.

Carlyle Smith, as Foreign Correspondent and Chum to Potentates, kept *Life* in touch with the higher life of Europe. He wrote about Windsor Castle, and commented upon the State of Home Rule there. He rushed imaginatively to Rome for interviews with the Pope or the King of Italy. It was Carlyle Smith who first gave to the world the sad news that the Infant King of Spain, Alphonso XIII, had taken to the bottle. Smith was a very busy young fellow. He looked after the International Yacht Races, and other sporting items of larger interest; he wrote ghost-stories, reported on the Dog Show, speculated on various matters of current interest, and, as political correspondent in the Cleveland-Blaine campaign, was exceedingly active.

In the presidential election of 1884 *Life* fought briskly for Cleveland. Bangs did most of the political writing. He conducted a column called "Boomlets," wrote for the editorial page, and permitted Carlyle Smith to report freely — very freely — upon the political situation. W. A. Rogers did most of the political cartooning. Bangs's boomlets were extensively quoted in the daily press, and had circulation far beyond the circulation of *Life*. Carlyle Smith thought that the country would have as good a time with Blaine as president as would a parrot and a monkey

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

enjoying each other's undivided attention. Every patriot who voted for Blaine might rest assured that no dollar would lie in the U. S. Treasury so humble but that Mr. Blaine would take a personal interest in it. Bangs was sympathetic on hearing that Mr. Blaine was sick, for he knew that he had recently suffered from exposure; and it was possibly for this reason that he created "The Liars Club," an association which met in Aberration Hall and pronounced its allegiance to James G. Blaine through its president, J. Ananias Dusenberry.<sup>1</sup>

When P. T. Barnum and Susan B. Anthony came out for Blaine, there was, of course, opportunity for fun. Bangs wrote of the great suffragist:

Miss Susan B.  
Anthony, she  
Has fallen in love with J.G.B.  
For Anthonee  
She thinks that he  
Would whoop up with vigor the policee  
Without which she  
This aged fe-  
Male thinks the country ain't worth a D.

<sup>1</sup> This is possibly the original germ of Theodore Roosevelt's famous Ananias Club, for Thomas Beer records in *The Mauve Decade*, 1926, that Theodore Roosevelt laughed loudly at a banquet in 1895 when Bangs, amusing the guests, said that "all theatrical press-agents belong to a club of which Ananias is the honorary president." The banquet of 1895 was that held at the Aldine Club in December of that year in honor of Theodore Roosevelt, writer and man of affairs.

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

Nor was such a minor party as the Prohibitionist ignored. It was said that the Prohibitionists had denied that their vote would be a full one, but Bangs said that the final telegram of their defeated candidate, though garbled in transmission, read hopefully: "The bottle is ours!" After November, when politics ceased to be of prime importance, Bangs closed down on his "Boomlets" with the valedictory:

The melancholy days have come,  
'Tis colder than the tomb,  
For politics no longer hum  
And boomlets cease to boom.

The political elections over, Bangs started his "By-the-Way" column, which, after several months, developed into a page. This page, carried on anonymously, was for the next few years the most frequently quoted section of *Life*, its terse sayings in paragraph, verse, or aphorism, being much favored in the newspaper exchange system of the country, particularly in the far-west by such papers as the *San Francisco Argonaut* and the *San Francisco Wasp*. Borrowings from *Life*, disseminated by the press, indicate that the newspapers of the day were fond of Bangs's silly little seasonal verses, as, for instance, "November":

In the fall the gobbling turkey  
'Bout the barnyard proudly struts,  
Heedless that November murky  
Finds him cooked and stuffed with nuts.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

And the Comic Irish — who were to reach their apotheosis at the close of the century in Finley Peter Dunne's *Mr. Dooley* — were in the eighties so much a part of the American scene as to make popular such of Bangs's celebrations in their honor as "The Pilgrim's Progress," written for St. Patrick's Day:

In the morning he sallies forth gaily,  
To join in the gallant parade,  
'Neath the sheet of green muslin that's labeled,  
The Old Tipperary Brigade.

About noon he shakes his shillalah,  
And calls, *wid de whole av 'is troat*,  
For some *bloody son of ould England*  
To tread on the tail of his coat.

And at night he's replete with emotion,  
Derived from six bottles of rye,  
And in honor of Holy St. Patrick  
Deprives his sweet spouse of an eye.

Bangs created a Mrs. Malaprop, or a Mrs. Partington, of his own, in order that he might more readily mistake words. This lady appeared in *Life's* columns as Mrs. Spriggins. She was a simple soul, and was much quoted in the newspapers. On reading that an old man of her acquaintance had died intestate, she remarked that she always knew he would ruin his innards. When the papers proclaimed that

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

Cleveland was in the van, she could not understand why a place could not have been found for him at least in the smoking car. She never could comprehend why them milliners the Vanderbilts called their famous horse "Maud-ess," when plain "Maud" would show she was a lady horse just as well. Once she bravely asserted that she would rather fool with a bee than be with a fool; and she grew terribly excited wondering if the Pope would let them Cardinal fellers wear their red hats when the Papal Bull was loose.

Anthony Comstock was in these days written down an ass, the A S S standing for the Association for the Suppression of Suggestion. *Life* refused to be Comstockized. Charles Dana Gibson caricatured the idea with horses and dogs and the animals in the Park Zoo all in trousers, while *Life's* cherubs danced merrily along without raiment. Comstock had actually objected to the naked cupids on *Life's* cover, and he had suggested that diapers be put on them. Bangs thought that a biped of Comstock's caliber would put trousers on the Apollo Belvedere, suppress the friezes of the Parthenon, and hold in contempt the licentious brute who had created the Venus of Milo. When Comstock and his Sunday Closing Committee objected to music in Central Park on Sundays, Bangs suggested a Polar Expedition for them at public expense. The *reductio ad absurdum* was reached when *Life* printed a picture with petticoats fluttering about the bare limbs of all the trees, and announced that

*John Kendrick Bangs*

Comstock had just had a New York butcher arrested for selling undressed beef.

*Life* in the eighties has many cartoons suggesting that a European War is about to break out, and bolsheviki are obviously already at work in Russia. W. A. Rogers shows the Goths at the Gate in America with the Knights of Labor rising against Monopoly, and there are rumors of a Slandered Oil Company. Yale is famous at this date for having once housed Chauncey M. Depew, and Depew's fame is so great that people are bewildered as to whether they should call the railroad station the Grand Central Depew or the Chauncey Depot. Harvard is being accused of making God optional, and cremation is becoming such a popular form of posthumous dissolution that the Pope is obliged to forbid it to Catholics, His Holiness apparently believing in only one post-mortem furnace. Robert G. Ingersoll is reported to have ordered in advance some extra fire-escapes for his own family mausoleum. Robert Browning, now in his latter days, has a pet spider that does all his writing for him, and Tennyson is busy with *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*. Charles Dudley Warner is writing about old women, and Dr. Holmes is said to be notoriously seventy. And that the general literary pulse is quickening over what it had been in the seventies may be gathered from Bangs's "Literary Note":

*Doing Better* is the title  
Of a paperette religious  
From the facile pen of Reverend E. P. Roe;

*Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

And we hope in doing better  
His advancement is prodigious,  
For he's heretofore been just a little slow.

These were the days when Eugene Field was recording the gradual Rise of Literature, Art, Music and Society, in Chicago in his *Culture's Garland*, 1887. Mrs. James Brown Potter of that city was rivaling Buffalo Bill as a theatrical attraction in London. Then suddenly from Chicago in 1888 came Ignatius Donnelly's *The Great Cryptogram: Francis Bacon's Cipher in the So-Called Shakspere Plays*.

“ Oh, good gracious,  
Ignatius!  
How you take on  
About Bacon! ”

exclaimed Bangs, and then asked,

“ If Bake  
Wrote Shake,  
Who's the Swan  
Of Avon? ”

In such scholarly problems *Life* was of course very much interested, for it took all things to be its province, even Bacon. Among *Life's* suggested solutions to the puzzling Shakespeare-Bacon problem was Bangs's anonymous “ collision theory ”:

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

One afternoon as Shakespeare was hurriedly coming around the corner of the Globe Theatre, on his way home from rehearsal, he ran against Francis Bacon, who was hastening to the greenroom in search of purely philosophical data. The two men bumped their heads together, and the result was a sudden depression in the skull of Shakespeare which promptly remodeled him into the dull lout that the Baconian theorists represented him to have been. He ceased to write plays. But Bacon's head was greatly improved by this sudden encounter with Shakespeare's. The bump which he at first thought to be a temporary enlargement of the caput, proved to be a permanent mansard addition to the Baconian phrenology, which gave room for the dramatic faculty. Bacon thereupon wrote the plays which Shakespeare otherwise would have written, while Shakespeare lapsed into a state of comparative imbecility, tempered by financial success as a theatre manager.

Bangs, indeed, speculated upon many matters — the site of the Garden of Eden, the whereabouts of the Forest of Arden, or the possibly once advantageous Utility of Tails. Frenchmen as Edibles engaged his attention. When cable messages announced that a cannibal king was about to give a royal feast at which captured Frenchmen were to be served *en barbecue*, Bangs's gastronomic imagination was greatly stirred. With the illustrative assistance of that prince of epicures Oliver Herford, he speculated as to whether the Frenchmen would taste better if served, in Car-

## *Humors of Life: Antical Manhattaner*

lyle's phrase, *sans culottes* — that is, without dressing — or, if with dressing, whether sauce piquante or tartare would be preferable. It was decided that Frenchman Fricassee *a l'Allemande* should be avoided, and that in no case should the dish be washed down with German beer or Rhine wines. A light sauterne, such as *Vin de Graves*, would be more appropriate. And, speaking of wines, it was about this time that an Austrian scientist announced that he had discovered the nervous system of sponges, which Bangs had previously located in the vicinity of the pocket-book. And, thinking of sponges, Bangs lamented that although man was already ninety percent water, the Prohibitionists were not yet satisfied. There was nothing like drink to provoke *reel* fun, he thought; to him, in those days, *Sic itur ad astra* seems to have signified *This way to the Astor House!*

If *Life* could be characterized by the phrase "infinite nonsense in a little room," it was not so nonsensical as to fail to have an eye for coming greatness. Theodore Roosevelt, already known as a reformer, had been cartooned in *Life* as early as 1883 in his later well-known posture of swinging an axe. He had served in the New York Assembly, 1882-84, and to avoid the necessity of actively supporting James G. Blaine — so it was said — he had fled to the West to meditate on a ranch until the time was ripe for his return. In the autumn of 1886, having returned from the western cattle-plains, Roosevelt ran for mayor of New York City against Abram S. Hewitt and Henry George. In *Life*

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

for November 4th there appeared Odes on the Election Result, celebrating victory for all three candidates. Bangs, who wrote them, at least prophesied correctly in his Laconian Ode to the victory of Mr. Hewitt, which read:

We thought you'd do it,  
Mr. Hewitt!

But, by playing safe and celebrating a possible victory for each of the candidates, Bangs happened to write under the title "Mayor Roosevelt" what is probably the earliest poem in history in honor of the Great Rough Rider:

In western plain full many a steed  
Has his unerring noose felt;  
'Tis not surprising that at home  
The mayor succumbs to Roosevelt.

In its issue of March 15, 1888, *Life* announced the retirement of Mr. J. K. Bangs from the Associate Editorship. Commenting on Bangs's retirement, *Town Topics* said:

What's this report that on the Square is rife?  
Has Bangs the editor then lost his life?  
Not so. He yet escapes death's fatal fangs,  
But *Life*, the jocular, has lost its Bangs.  
No great misfortune that you are aware.  
The style is out of fashion everywhere.  
And then, moreover, you will always find  
That Bangs implies a head, but not a mind.  
  
While as for *Life*, put out afresh to nurse,  
It may grow better, and it can't be worse.

*CLEARING THE WAY*

W

ILE Bangs was in the midst of his antical career on *Life*, his father died suddenly, a victim of intensive and irregular habits of work, and a generous diet including considerable alcoholic stimulus. The elder Bangs, despite his enjoyment of an exceedingly lucrative legal practice, had not in the brief decade of his eminence amassed any large fortune. He had started at scratch, the eleventh child of a Methodist divine; he had in the early seventies averaged in his earnings about \$20,000 a year; during his final decade he probably did not average annually above \$100,000. He was well-known for the moderation of his charges. On one occasion a client crossed out a figure of \$7,500 on a bill Bangs sent him, and wrote in the figure \$15,000, handing Bangs a check for the same.

The elder Bangs had maintained a considerable establishment. He had a large double-house in West 55th Street. He entertained lavishly, especially after his second marriage, to Mary Adams Batcheller of Boston, a very hand-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

some widow with four young sons. The Batcheller family had wealth of its own; but the division of Francis N. Bangs's property at his death between his own three sons, his widow, with provisions for Mrs. Nassau and others, eventuated in J. K. Bangs inheriting about \$60,000 in cash and securities, and part interest in a real estate development on South Broadway, Yonkers, known as "The Crescent." This included for J. K. about two and one-half houses. At the time of his father's death, J. K. was occupying one of these houses together with Mrs. Nassau and a first-cousin, Agnes Lawson Hyde.

On March 3, 1886, about three months after the death of his father, Bangs married Agnes Hyde at All Souls' Church, New York City. Agnes was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jabez B. Hyde of Brooklyn, and her mother was a sister of John Kendrick's mother. Bangs and his bride took a wedding trip to Europe. After spending some money in this way, Bangs spent some more in a publishing venture.

To George J. Coombes, Bookmaker, Importer, Publisher, of Fifth Avenue, New York, Bangs loaned \$5,000, in perpetuity. Coombes was at this time making a reputation for himself by elegant little volumes published by him, and one of these volumes was Bangs's first book, an oblong affair entitled *The Lorgnette*. *The Lorgnette* was in a sense an offshoot of *Life*, for it was a series of society jests by Bangs with illustrations in the Du Maurier manner by S. W. Van Schaick, one of *Life's* artists in black and white. These

## *Clearing the Way*

satirical drives at current metropolitan foibles such as money-worship, caddishness, and Anglomania, were accounted both good-natured and severe. Some critics found Bangs's wit superior to Du Maurier's, and Van Schaick's drawings less effective. Other critics pronounced Van Schaick as high-bred and elegant as the British master, but found the Bangs legends not so pointed as his. Bangs himself declared *The Lorgnette* "a pronounced failure — flat, stale and unprofitable." This book was published about December 1886.

Early in 1887 Coombes published another book by Bangs, *Roger Camerden. A Strange Story*. The first edition was issued anonymously. Later editions carried Bangs's name. The book went out of print with the failure of Coombes, 1890. *Roger Camerden* was a story that could be read in a half hour. Reviews were largely favorable. In Boston, for example, the *Transcript* thought it a very clever little story, and the *Literary World* remarked upon the author's ingenuity in sustaining the interest of his tale, but the *Atlantic Monthly* thought that most readers could lay it aside at any point. The *San Francisco Argonaut*, then considered the best literary publication in the country, was enthusiastic. It felt that the story was written in a way which would hold the reader's attention to the last word and that it would cling to the memory long.

*Roger Camerden* is a study in overwrought imagination and the phantasms of a diseased brain, but there is noth-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

ing morbid or depressing about it. Its gloom is not emotional, but entertainingly psychological. It is a tale of mystery, love, and revenge, involving hallucination, and it is significant of Bangs's lively interest in the occult and in the vagaries of the human mind. *Roger Camerden* belongs to the curios of literature. It is exemplary of the weird sort of thing Bangs might have continued to produce had the book been notably successful or had not his professional duties kept him to other paths. One critic thought that Nathaniel Hawthorne might have made something out of the case of double delusion underlying the story. The story was told, however, with such an air of reality that a British psychological society carried on a correspondence with Bangs in regard to the source of his plot, believing that it must have been based upon some actual occurrence. The atmosphere of the book itself is somewhat British, and it was mostly written in Liverpool during Bangs's wedding journey.

In December 1887 Ticknor & Company, Boston, published through the University Press, Cambridge, Bangs's third book, *New Waggings of Old Tales*, in an edition of 1000 copies. This book was later taken over by Houghton, Mifflin and Company, and republished 1891 and 1896. *New Waggings of Old Tales* was the combined product of three contributors to *Life*, Bangs, Frank Dempster Sherman, and Oliver Herford. The book consists of burlesque stories and verses, a satire upon the then comparatively novel popu-

## *Clearing the Way*

lar public exercises known as Authors' Readings. Such readings had recently been given in Boston, Washington, and New York, on behalf of international copyright, and James Russell Lowell, president of the American Copyright League, had presided as chairman at the two New York functions in Chickering Hall. He had presided wittily and felicitously, and in the *New Waggings of Old Tales* he appears as The Distinguished Diplomat. His platform style is caricatured as he there introduces The Eminent Realist (Mr. Howells), The Apostle of Obscurity (Mr. Browning), The Disciple of Ambiguity (Mr. Stockton), The African Reminiscencer (Mr. Haggard), The Leader of the Fleshly School (Mr. Swinburne), The Great Romancer (Mr. Stevenson), and The Illustrious Laureate (Mr. Tennyson).

Among the more amusing things in the *New Waggings* are the drawings of initial letters by Herford, each exhibiting Mr. Lowell in some typical posture as he rises to introduce the various authors travestied. After hearkening to Browning's parleyings with the muse, one agrees with The Distinguished Diplomat that

Robert B.  
Rowning he  
Is too much addicted t' obscuritee.

In the *New Waggings* the prose is the work of Bangs and the poetical parody the work of Sherman. The book was much admired by various critics. It was characterized as

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

a volume of good humor tipped with satire, a wonderful exhibition of the brilliancy of American wit. "A brighter worthier specimen of what might be called our new school of satire has never appeared." Robert Bridges particularly noted Bangs's clear rapid flexible prose which carried wit and satire gracefully.

Bangs and his collaborator in the *New Waggings* were close friends. He and Sherman had associated intimately ever since their days on the *Acta Columbiana*, and Sherman was a frequent contributor to *Life*, not only under his own name, but as "Felix Carmen" and as "The Idle Idyller." Sherman often wrote in verse his requests for payment for his contributions. His inspiration was no less fecund when in pursuit of gold than when in pursuit of song:

Dear John: Perhaps this rhyme will please  
*Life's* "lean, lank, hungry" Editor,  
If so, the Idyller agrees  
To be his friendly creditor.  
I trust the check will be so gen-  
Erous for this song, lyrical,  
In after years it may be men-  
Tioned almost as a miracle.

When Bangs resigned from *Life*, March 1888, he was at work on a Gothamized version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. This dramatic composition, *Katharine. A Travesty*, was written expressly for the gray-coated young gallants of Co. I, Seventh Regiment, N. G. S. N. Y. It was produced at the

## *Clearing the Way*

Metropolitan Opera House for "one consecutive night," April 5, 1888, as a charitable performance to endow hospital beds for militiamen. The songs in the travesty were sung to the tunes of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and the soldier boys were aided by some of the best amateur talent of the city, as well as by a choir of seventy-five voices, male and female, from St. Thomas's Church. Francis Wilson, then performing at the Casino Theatre across Broadway, came over to coach the actors. Over \$5,000 was spent in preparation for the occasion.

Piecing together newspaper records of the event, we find that upon the evening of the performance such meteorological conditions as thunder and lightning did not deter a gay audience from assembling. The audience was one of the most brilliant that had ever filled the Metropolitan. The floor of the great edifice and the tiers of boxes were filled with glistening shirt-fronts, waving fans, and charming feminine faces. It was a very fashionable audience. The big curtain was rung up, and a number of frisky Paduans in slashed doublets of many colors announced smilingly and harmoniously that they were a pretty tough lot, and

Sacrifice to pleasure  
In the very fullest measure,  
Till we seek the well-earned leisure  
Of the grave.

One of the songs, sung by Tranio and Lucentio, made a special hit, as may be surmised from the sparkle of such

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

stanzas as the following, a topical satire on the current New York dude:

Two little dudes from Pisa we,  
Starting out the world to see  
Filled to the brim with ghoulish glee —  
Two little dudes are we.

Two little dudes with spirits airy,  
Skipped while the governor, all unwary,  
Lay fast asleep in his big library —  
Two little dudes are we.

The rôle of Katharine was taken by Edward Fales Coward, a talented amateur actor. He so modeled his performance upon the lines drawn by Ada Rehan in her triumphant performance of *The Shrew* in 1887 that the travesty took on extra interest as a reflection of that triumph. *Katharine* abounded in quaint sayings and quips, and the use of localisms was said to have been particularly well handled. The *Mirror* characterized Bangs's work as extremely bright. The *Dramatic News* said that a happy vein of humor ran through the burlesque. And the *Times* found the dialogue spirited and neat. Indeed, the press generally made much of the occasion with such column heads as "Katharine in Trousers" or "A Regiment in Corsets"; and the *Journal* reported that "everyone laughed until he cried, and the curtain dropped amid deafening applause, while bouquets fell at the feet of the players, and the author blushed a rosy red of joy and gratitude."

## *Clearing the Way*

Yet a good time was not had by all. In the aftermath there came dissenting voices. In *Town Topics* one bard wrote:

Bangs' Shakespeare burlesque suits a certain class:  
And the dead lion clothes the living ass.

Ah! who can picture *his* undreamt of pangs  
Were Shakespeare living and burlesquing Bangs.

And some gentility, writing under the name of "Moralist," contributed a letter to this same genial publication, strenuously objecting to the "unsexing of the sexes" as lately exhibited in Bangs's burlesque. The Moralist noted the fact that Vassar girls had latterly put on socks and trousers, and lamented a condition "calculated to leave an impress of the masquerade in the minds of the participants pregnant with debasing suggestions." "Our young women," said the Moralist, "are becoming horsey and sporty and genuinely masculine enough, heaven knows, without the sanction of society that they shall put on the garments and demeanor of the other sex even in private; and our young men are growing up in a sufficiently light-voiced and effeminate groove without the factitious aid of corsets, crinoline and lingerie." This in the Elegant Eighties!

Performances of *Katharine* with the original cast were repeated during April at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Yonkers Music Hall, and the New York Academy of Music. In 1889 there was a production given by students at Amherst College, and in March 1892 the Princeton Uni-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

versity Dramatic Association staged *Katharine* with Newton Booth Tarkington, then president of the Association, in the rôle of Petrucio. The success of *Katharine* at Princeton inspired Booth Tarkington to dramatic writing of his own. In emulation of *Katharine*, he and George Post Wheeler the next year collaborated on the libretto of another Shakespearean burlesque, *The Hon. Julius Caesar* — which became the initiatory production of the now famous Princeton Triangle Club.

Bangs in the spring of 1889 wrote another burlesque for the Seventh Regiment. This time he took Goethe's *Faust* as his subject, and the result was *Mephistopheles. A Profanation*. Here he treated his material with greater freedom than he had permitted himself the year before, when in the case of *Katharine* he had followed with some fidelity the Shakespearean plot. This freedom is indicated in the title, which gives Mephistopheles the premier rôle. A descriptive list of the *dramatis personae* furnishes a hint of the atmosphere of the piece:

**MEPHISTOPHELES:** Prince of Darkness, fonder of Sweetness than of Light. In love with Marguerite. In every way the Deuce of a fellow.

**FAUST:** Principal of the Nuremburg Academy for Young Ladies and Gentlemen. About to enter upon his second childhood. Also in love with Marguerite.

**MARGUERITE:** The village belle. In love with no one, especially Mephistopheles.

## *Clearing the Way*

**MARTHA:** A widow, Marguerite's mother, whom nobody loves.

**THE JANITOR OF HADES:** Vice-President of the United Kingdom of Sin.

**MEPHISTOPHELES, JR.:** The Son of his Father.

The reception given *Mephistopheles* was like unto that accorded *Katharine*, only this time there were three performances at the Metropolitan, May 7, 8, and 9. On all three occasions the audiences were reported to be large — “the boxes looked like opera nights and *everybody* was present.” The first night audience included Grover Cleveland, who had come to New York on the expiration of his presidential term to associate himself with Bangs, Stetson, Tracy, and MacVeagh, in which firm the “Bangs” now represented John Kendrick’s older brother, Francis Sedgwick Bangs.

“If frequent and hearty laughter and applause may be taken as an indication of success,” said the *New York Tribune*, “Mr. Bangs’s burlesque achieved a veritable triumph.” Little Mephistopheles, Jr., who never said a word, but who trotted about with his father as a comic shadow, imitating all the paternal actions, was accounted a capital hit. And in the second act when Marguerite’s brother returned from the wars at the head of a battalion of the Seventh Regiment, with Cappa’s band and drum corps in the lead, the stage presented, according to the *Herald*, a beau-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

tiful and dazzling military exhibition which would not soon be forgotten. In all, there were over four hundred performers taking part in *Mephistopheles*, and it was said to be the largest amateur performance ever given on the city stage.

Both *Katharine* and *Mephistopheles* were privately printed, respectively in 1888 and 1889, at The Art Age Press, Gillis Brothers & Turnure, New York. *Katharine* was bound in white cream paper with a cover-illustration in black and white of two cupids at war by John Ames Mitchell. *Mephistopheles* was bound in red and stamped in black with the figures of Mephistopheles Senior and Junior, the illustrative work of Clarence G. Bush. In his chapter on American Burlesque in *Curiosities of the American Stage*, 1891, Laurence Hutton gives honorable mention to these productions, declaring that Bangs showed in them a power of invention which proved him to be, perhaps, the only true son of the Father of Burlesque, Hipponax himself.

The night preceding the production of *Katharine* at the Metropolitan, Bangs had been presented in Yonkers with a son, John Kendrick Bangs, Jr. When he was asked if the infant might not be called a new edition of *Life*, the proud father replied: "Say rather the latest edition of the *Sun*." The pertinency of this mild jest is that it indicates that Bangs was already on the staff of the *New York Evening Sun*, to which he contributed in 1888-89, for a time conducting a column called "Spotlets." At the same time, two days after the production of *Katharine*, Henry Mills Alden wrote

## *Clearing the Way*

Bangs, inviting him to join the staff of *Harper's Magazine*, to take charge of its humorous department, "The Editor's Drawer," and also of the "Facetiae" page of *Harper's Bazar*.

"The Editor's Drawer" was the most venerable department of *Harper's Monthly*. It had been famous for a generation as an institution of American Humor. Established in 1851, it carried on a tradition still more remote, that of "The Editor's Table" of the older *Knickerbocker Magazine*, which had given the *Knickerbocker* rank as the best comic periodical of its time. Lewis Gaylord Clark, who had edited the *Knickerbocker*, later edited the "Drawer" for *Harper's*, and is the connecting link in this humorous sequence. The "Drawer" had been largely anecdotal in character, but now with new developments it seemed wise to make a change.

With the successful rise of the comic weeklies, *Puck*, *Judge*, and *Life*, and the development of the newspaper *column*, American humorous journalism had taken on a swifter pace than in the old days when the monthly repository of "ancient jest and anecdote" in *Harper's Magazine* had formed the mainstay of comic diet for the fireside consumption of America's best families. There were now so many more wits about town making a living through smartness and brilliancy and so many more vehicles for the transmission of their wares, that a monthly service of anecdotes took on something of the nature of slow freight. Practi-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

tioners of wit, therefore, with mordant sarcasm and without reverence for the sanctity of age, soon came to regard the honorable "Drawer" as being in a state of anecdote. Mark Twain referred to it as "that potter's field." Humorous skits were written about the age and weight of its jokes, and they were referred to as opiates. Bangs himself had recently made an unfortunate reference in *Life* to Charles Dudley Warner — whom he succeeded as editor of the "Drawer" — as Charles Deadly Warning. The "Drawer" through the eighties was exhibiting signals of distress, and Bangs, as a representative of the new developments in humor and satire, was summoned by the Harpers to bring about a rehabilitation.

At the time that Bangs joined the staff of *Harper's Magazine* the departments of that periodical formed in themselves the most remarkable combination of editorial talent that the periodical world could show. Presiding over the magazine was Henry Mills Alden, whose editorial genius for fifty years kept *Harper's* in the forefront of the illustrated monthlies of the world. Occupying "The Editor's Easy Chair" was George William Curtis, and "The Editor's Study" was the province of William Dean Howells. Laurence Hutton wrote the "Literary Notes," and Warner, although he relinquished the editorship of the "Drawer" to Bangs, remained its Honorary Conductor until 1892, supplying its charming introductory essaylets. Bangs in association with such an editorial group, himself but twenty-

## *Clearing the Way*

six years of age, was brought to a better comprehension than had previously been his of the meaning of Cicero's characterization of humor as *chastened* impudence.

Bangs began editing the "Drawer" with discretion. Soon, however, a change became noticeable. "John Kendrick Bangs has brightened up Harper's Drawer wonderfully," said the *Philadelphia American*. "He has lately taken charge of the celebrated Drawer," said the *Boston Evening Record*, "and the musty jokes are being surely weeded out." The change which Bangs wrought in the "Drawer" may best be indicated by saying that the anecdotal character of the department took secondary place to the new humorous values, especially in their more literary aspects, developed in the letter-press of *Life* and *Puck*. Already in the mid-eighties the influence of *Life*'s drawings had begun to invade the "Drawer," as had also a certain amount of what Warner pleased to call "manufactured facetiousness." Frank Luther Mott, in his *A History of American Magazines*, 1938, says that Bangs changed the "Drawer" to a "really distinguished collection of pictorial and literary satire." As that change in its brightest aspect belongs to the nineties, a consideration of it belongs to a later chapter.

In the interim, since at this time his work at Harpers required but two afternoons per week and his work for the *Evening Sun* could be tossed off anywhere, Bangs became involved with Frank A. Munsey for the first six months of

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

1889. Munsey had arrived in New York from the State of Maine in the early eighties and had published a juvenile weekly, *The Golden Argosy*. He was in search of grandiose circulations, and in 1889 he entered the adult field with *Munsey's Weekly*, hoping to turn out a successful paper which should blend in happy ratio the news and artistic features of *Harper's Weekly* with the wit and mercurial gaiety of *Life*. He selected Bangs as the Moses to lead him to the promised land.

*Munsey's Weekly* started off vivaciously in February, losing money — which was to be expected — and running into an editorial snag — which was inevitable. Munsey was a man of extraordinary energy. Bangs described him as a human dynamo. The man who discovered Munsey, said Bangs, discovered perpetual motion. Munsey was all the time in and out of the office, wanting to know what his editor was doing. This practice so diverged from that of John Ames Mitchell, to which Bangs had become used, that the electrical atmosphere became too surcharged with Munsey for endurance. The immediate cause of the severance of relations between Munsey and Bangs, however, resulted from the fact that Munsey had literary ambitions.

In 1887 Munsey had published a book, dimly autobiographical, *Afloat in a Great City*. About April 1889 he had completed another book. It dealt with what he thought the exciting business of periodical publishing and love. It was called *A Tragedy of Errors*. Munsey handed it to

## *Clearing the Way*

Bangs for publication in *Munsey's Weekly*. Bangs rejected it, suggesting that Munsey for the good of the paper dispose of it elsewhere. An altercation took place, ending in a victory for Munsey, with Bangs's proffered resignation to take place at Munsey's convenience in June.

When Munsey's novel began its serial appearance in a May issue of the *Weekly*, the first installment being a double one, Bangs led off his editorial page with a semi-apologetic paragraph under the caption "A Tragedy of Errors." He said that because the story was written by Mr. Munsey he refrained from speaking of its merits as he would if it were written by an author not connected with the paper. "We will simply state that it is a story of the present, that it is located in New York and deals to a large extent with society and society people. This may suggest that it is a vapid tale without action, but such is not the case. In force of dramatic situations it is not wanting. We must ask the indulgence of our readers for occupying so much of this issue with Mr. Munsey's story. The *Weekly's* space will not be so encroached upon again."

After Bangs left *Munsey's Weekly*, R. H. Titherington became its editor. In two years the periodical succeeded in losing \$100,000. Munsey concluded that a weekly paper was a "dead cock in the pit." So he changed *Munsey's Weekly* into *Munsey's Magazine*, making it an outstanding factor in modern publishing history and achieving by 1896 a monthly circulation of over 600,000 copies. Bangs and

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## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Munsey never really quarreled. Bangs in his latter years was a frequent contributor to *Munsey's Magazine* under many assumed names. He also, in 1891, was for a short time a star editorial writer for *The Daily Continent*, a brief venture in the field of journalism, when, says Titherington, Munsey issued before its time the first modern tabloid newspaper.

By the close of the eighties, Bangs, in addition to editing the "Drawer" of *Harper's Monthly* and the "Facetiae" of the *Bazar*, had taken charge of the humorous section of *Harper's Young People*. He was also contributing miscellaneous matter to *Harper's Weekly*. From this time until 1900 he held the position of Editor of the Departments of Humor for Messrs. Harper & Brothers. As Harper & Brothers was then accounted the periodical center of the United States, Bangs's position gave him wide influence in the development of comic journalism in America. He sat for a decade astride the humorous matter of the four Harper periodicals and was himself their most prolific humorous contributor. It is because of his position at Harpers, his earlier intimate and later irregular association with *Life*, his editorship of *Puck*, 1904-1905, his own multifarious contributions to the periodical humor of his day, his extraordinary popularity as a writer of books in the nineties, and his later still greater success as a humorous lecturer, that Bangs stands out as a central figure in the American humorous and comic tradition.

*LITERARY ASSOCIATIONS  
OF THE EARLY NINETIES*

**I**N the early nineties Bangs grew weary of living at "The Crescent" in the low, flat section of South Broadway, Yonkers, and moved his growing family to a newly constructed abode, described as "a spacious, light, and roomy villa," on ample grounds along the highest section of North Broadway. Because of the severity of its lines, Bangs's new home created considerable discussion among the neighbors, who dwelt in domiciles replete with cupolas and like excrescences. By the close of June 1892 Bangs was the *pater familias* of a wife and three sons, not to mention a sister-in-law, Miss Anne Hyde, whom an observant novelist of eminence, in a presentation copy of one of his books, called "the brightest and most charming maid I ever met." There were also several handmaids and nurses, whom Bangs denominated *Le Cercle de Bejabers*;

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Old Jim, the gardener; and Colonel Mack Puggins, a dog, who eventually drowned himself with a muffled yelp in a barrel of flour — a demise not discovered by Ellen, the cook, until after the Colonel had been missing for some time. Ellen herself ended in the custody of the police, after she had chased the laundress upstairs with an axe, a vicious weapon which John Kendrick Bangs somehow wrested from her in the only hand to hand conflict he ever had with a woman — as far as we know.

Bangs's eldest son Jakey, Jr., was by the middle of 1892 in his fifth year, and he had early put on sufficient personality to attract his father's literary interest. He was easily his father's favorite son, Bangs not having much time in his busy journalistic career for the later progeny, Howard Russell Bangs, born Decoration Day, 1891, and Francis Hyde Bangs, born June 29 or 30, 1892. Bangs's interest in Jakey was such that he became a hero, under the name of "Jimmieboy," in a series of juvenile volumes which made popular children's reading in their day.

The first of these juveniles, *Tiddleywink Tales*, 1891, was published by R. H. Russell & Son, New York, and by Griffith, Farran & Co., London. Robert Howard Russell, the New York publisher, became about this time the god-father of Howard Russell Bangs. He ceremoniously presented "Little Russ," as the child was called, with a silver whiskey flask at the christening. Russell also published Bangs's other juveniles, *The Tiddleywink's Poetry Book*,

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

1892, *In Camp with a Tin Soldier*, 1892, *Half-Hours with Jimmieboy*, 1893, and *The Mantel-Piece Minstrels*, 1896. The books were carefully printed and prettily illustrated by such artists as Charles Howard Johnson, E. M. Ashe, Frank Verbeck, J. T. Richards, Peter Newell, and F. Berkeley Smith. Several of them were reprinted as late as 1900, and they were favorably reviewed as among the best juvenile literature of the time. A good deal of the matter they contained had first appeared in *Harper's Young People*.

*Tiddleywink Tales* was reviewed as full of fun and oddity, the work of a poet and a philosopher, which had the distinction of being witty and wise, full of delightful fancy and the charm of good writing. Though the hero of the tales was Jimmieboy, aged three and one half years, the title found its justification in the select company of Tiddleywinks with whom the hero associated. These Tiddleywinks were gifted with the powers of speech and repartee, and one of them could make verses. Grotesque creatures stalked the pages of the book, the Whimperjam, the Teehe-elephant, the Mangatoo and the Anniroony Bird, and they were prettily bodied forth in sketches by Charles Howard Johnson, at that time one of *Life's* artists. The New York *Tribune* admired the wild, fantastic illogicality of the *Tiddleywink Tales* and declared that Bangs might be congratulated upon a really fascinating bit of nonsense. *The Tiddleywink's Poetry Book* was a large yellow oblong volume, in which verses by Bangs accompanied the illustra-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

tions of the earlier book, giving Johnson's pictures better opportunity to display themselves.

*In Camp with a Tin Soldier* exhibits Jimmieboy a year older than in the *Tales*. He has become the general of an army of tin soldiers in pursuit of a complicated creature called the *Parallelopipedon*. The illustrations of E. M. Ashe portraying Jimmieboy among his Lilliputian soldiers are charming, and the picture of the poor *Parallelopipedon* smashing a glass mirror merely by gazing in it is more pathetic than terrifying. In *Half-Hours with Jimmieboy* the youthful hero has grown old enough to entertain himself with his own imagination, and there are here related Jimmieboy's astonishing adventures in the Land of Nod.

Off and on, during the rest of his life, Bangs wrote juvenile literature, but never so extensively as at this period. He contributed continuously verse, tale, farce, and short humor, to *Harper's Young People*. He also wrote for *St. Nicholas*, in which appeared, in 1893, "The Little Elfman." This poem combines in small limits so much simplicity and sense that it is today often reprinted in anthologies and children's readers. Its verses run:

I met a little Elfman once,  
Down where the lilies blow.

I asked him why he was so small,  
And why he didn't grow.

He slightly frowned, and with his eye  
He looked me through and through —

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

“I’m just as big for me,” said he,  
“As you are big for you!”<sup>1</sup>

Below the nursery or juvenile department of Bangs’s household was his library. The library ran the length of the southern end of the house, and it included a study with windows and porch opening upon a vista of the Hudson. Ernest Dressel North, one of the best-known figures in the rare-book field, said that Bangs told his architect, when planning the house, that he wanted a library 40 x 30 and that he did not care what else was put around it. It was North more than any other book-dealer who aided Bangs in acquiring the items wherewith to enrich his shelves.

As a bookman Bangs exerted his bibliophilic impulses not only in collecting items in the fields of his special interest — folk-lore, myth, fairy-tale, the supernatural, and all types of strange and fantastic legend — but also in the production of a stream of verses on bookish themes. These verses shaped themselves mostly to the quatrain, not infrequently epigrammatic in character. In an old notebook of this period Bangs jotted down a hundred and more such quatrains, the most of which found their way into the Harper periodicals, into the *Century Magazine*, with sprinklings for *Life* and *Puck*. These little jack-knife verses, and other bookish poems, gave Bangs something of a reputation as a bibliophile, so that when Gleason White, in 1893,

<sup>1</sup> From *The Foothills of Parnassus*. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company, Publishers.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

made his classic collection *Book-Song* for “The Book Lover’s Library,” his collection contained a fair representation of Bangs’s offerings in this field. The epigrammatist when he waxes sarcastic is ever liable to repayment in his own coin. Bangs published in the *Century*:

I tried to climb Parnassus high,  
But gave up in despair,  
For at the foot ’twas crowded by  
The asses grazing there.

This offered too sweet an opportunity for retort, and an anonymous bard replied:

So Kendrick Bangs, so faint of heart,  
Gave up to dire despair.  
He helped to crowd it at the foot —  
Thus came the asses there.

It was part of Bangs’s business at Harper & Brothers to have regard for comic drawings and pictorial social caricature. His association with J. A. Mitchell and *Life*’s illustrators had initiated him into this field. Now, at the Harper establishment, where pictorial illustration had been notably forwarded under Charles Parsons of the Harper art department, Bangs had opportunities to exercise his selective faculties in pictorial as well as written humor. As a student in this aspect of art, he became a discriminating collector of original sketches and prints representing the history of political and social caricature from Hogarth down

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

through Gillray to Caran d'Ache and Du Maurier. He was particularly interested in the illustrators of Dickens and Thackeray and the caricaturists of *Punch*, and he had a notable collection of drawings by John Leech, H. K. Browne, Frederick Barnard, and, in particular, Cruikshank. As time went on, he added examples of American illustrative work in this field. Several reproductions from originals which hung in his library were used to illustrate Du Maurier's *Social Pictorial Satire*, 1898. A good many of these originals were on exhibition at the house-warming of the new Aldine Club when it opened its rooms in 1890 at 20 Lafayette Place, New York, a club which was to take an immediate rôle in the literary and artistic life of the city.

New York in the eighties had developed an acute consciousness of literary and artistic effort. This consciousness materialized itself in the founding of clubs. Of course, there had existed in New York from the time of the later Knickerbockers the venerated Century Association, an outgrowth of the yet earlier Sketch Club. But the Century remained an institution beyond the reach of any but the chosen few, mostly older men. The purpose of the Century was to associate men eminent in the various professions by the common bond of a love of art and literature. This purpose had been brilliantly fulfilled, and the Century had long been the most distinguished club of the city. It embodied the culture and the civilization of the town.

But the time had arrived when it was no longer necessary

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

for the younger and less eminent writers, journalists, artists, or actors, to gather in bar-rooms or restaurants as in the old days of Pfaff's beer and *Vanity Fair*. Now there developed clubs specifically differentiated, wherein the representatives of journalism, literature, and the arts, might associate more liberally in halls and houses of their own. These clubs were the Authors, born in 1882 and incorporated in 1887, the Players, founded 1888, and the Aldine, founded 1889. By the close of the eighties Bangs had become a member of these three clubs, and in April 1892 he was elected to the Century.

The opportunities afforded through membership in these institutions can only be suggested. One might at the Authors attend a dignified reception in honor of James Russell Lowell, or take part in a less dignified limerick contest such as that when first prize by acclamation went to Frank R. Stockton for his spontaneous production:

There was an Old Monk of Siberia,  
Whose life it grew drearier and drearier,  
Till he broke from his cell  
With the hell of a yell,  
And eloped with the Mother Superior.

At the Players one might meet Hamlet off-stage in the friendly guise of Edwin Booth, Rip Van Winkle in dishabille as Joseph Jefferson, or those younger masters of dramatic comedy, John Drew and Francis Wilson — the latter being the possessor of so much natural wit in himself

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

as to rival the later comic genius of the club, Oliver Herford. And at the Century one might attend the famous Saturday Nights, particularly the Saturday Night of the monthly meeting, when, in addition to the usual substantial supper, there was "punch for the carnal man and a show of pictures for the intellectual being." It was one of these monthly meetings which the brilliant French wit and lecturer Max O'Rell attended, and celebrated his attendance by declaring in his book *Jonathan and His Continent*, 1889, that nowhere else in the world were there such handsome faces to be seen.

Of these clubs Bangs was in the early nineties most intimately associated with the Aldine. This club was particularly devoted to publishers, but was open to authors, artists, printers, and amateurs interested in the purposes of the institution. Bangs was on the Aldine Entertainment Committee and necessarily took an active part in its proceedings. One of the first receptions given by the Aldine was in 1890 to Mr. and Mrs. Henry M. Stanley. Stanley had returned from three years' absence in Darkest Africa. Before coming to America for a lecture tour under the auspices of Major Pond, he had married Miss Dorothy Tennant, the noted beauty whom Sir John Millais immortalized in his painting "The Letter." The Aldine reception enabled leading citizens of New York to meet the distinguished visitors. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley stood in one corner in a little green grotto made of palms and pines, where

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

they received those who called to meet them. When Bangs had occasion to speak to someone on the other side of the line of visitors and found it necessary to pass behind the guests of honor, Stanley turned and faced him as he did so, and, turning as on a pivot, kept face to face with him as he proceeded. Stanley did not return to his interrupted business of handshaking until Bangs had passed to a safe distance. He had acquired habits in the jungle which made it almost impossible for him to permit any stranger to pass behind him.

At the Aldine there originated evenings of entertainment known as Story Tellers' Nights, when members sat about the fire in more or less informal fashion and related tales or recounted adventures for the general delight of the gathering. Newspaper gossip recalls evenings of this sort in the early nineties when those participating were George W. Cable, Paul du Chaillu, Charles Dudley Warner, Thomas A. Janvier, Will Carleton, F. Hopkinson Smith, Henry van Dyke, Thomas Nelson Page, Stockton, Bangs, and Bill Nye. These Story Tellers' Nights were soon dignified with special names. There was a Hunters' Night when Theodore Roosevelt was the star of the evening, an Arctic Night when Robert E. Peary spoke for the North Pole, and a Western Campfire Night when General Miles and others sat about the fire and told tales of adventure "while lights glistened on Indian blankets and Mexican trappings."

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

The Aldine gave delightful dinners, too. In 1893 there were dinners to F. Marion Crawford and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. In the mid-nineties there were dinners or receptions for Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope, Ian Maclaren, James M. Barrie, and Hall Caine. Howells, who occasionally attended Story Tellers' Nights, was shy of taking part himself. In 1891, in an amusing regret, he wrote Bangs: "I am gradually exiling myself by begging off from all such honors as you propose. My enthusiasm is of a type somewhat different from that which commits hari-kari on a full stomach for the pleasure of one's commensals. I wish I could bring myself to do it, but I cannot. I have a bad conscience about it, but I cannot help it." He ended his regret with a postscript asking how it would do if he were to entertain the company by reading one of his novels through.

There was also the Thursday Evening Club, and it furnished the most delightfully intimate and private entertainments wherewith metropolitan society regaled itself. Its fortnightly reunions were held at the homes of various of its members, among the most élite of the city. An interesting meeting of this club in 1891 is recorded in the pages of *The Critic*. The meeting took place at the home of Mrs. Burton Harrison in Irving Place. This memorable evening, says Mrs. Harrison in her *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 1911, was punctuated by a patter of polite applause from a hundred seated guests, and followed by a supper. The

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

entertainment consisted of a new number of Mrs. Harrison's living magazine, *The Ephemeron: A Journal of an Hour.*

Over the living table of contents of *The Ephemeron* presided, as associate editor, Judge Henry E. Howland, famous raconteur of New York. At the outset he read a "Prologue" written by Mrs. Frederic Rhinelander Jones, bluestocking. Later, because of the unavoidable absence of Bishop Henry Codman Potter, the Judge read that worthy prelate's "Dream of the Thursday Evening Club of the Future." Other contributions to *The Ephemeron* included "The Little Chap," a pathetic tale delivered by Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, who took Tolstoi for master and was then accounted a novelist of high rank; a dramatic poem called "Arria," recited by Miss Edith Thomas, famed poetess; a chapter from *The Squirrel Inn*, read by Frank R. Stockton from advance sheets of the *Atlantic*, sent with the compliments of Thomas Bailey Aldrich; poems delivered by Richard Watson Gilder and Robert Underwood Johnson, editors of the *Century*. There was also a story by Julian Hawthorne; a poem by Matthew Arnold, contributed by his daughter; and a sketch by Mrs. Van Rensselaer Cruger. Finally, to bring the entertainment to an amusing close, true to the character of the leading magazines, Bangs read selections of prose and verse from his as yet unpublished *Coffee and Repartee*.

It was the imaginative Mrs. Burton Harrison, we be-

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

lieve, who had first suggested the idea of Authors' Readings as a means of raising funds for international copyright. Ever since those readings of the eighties, this method of raising money for needy causes had been employed. People gladly paid to witness authors and editors in action. The aureoles surrounding the heads of those who had got themselves into print had not in the early nineties lost luster. Authorship was still hedged with divinity, editors were literary dictators, and the name of almost any regular contributor to a leading magazine became that dearly beloved item "a household word."

Many were the Authors' Readings in which Bangs as a young man took part, associating at one time or another with almost every writer of distinction of the day. One of the more lofty of these occasions was that held at Carnegie Hall, February 1894, to raise funds for improvident booksellers. After an organ prelude, the intellectual fodder began when Richard Watson Gilder introduced General Lew Wallace, who read a dramatic incident from *The Prince of India*. Gilder then read a reminiscence of the funeral of General Sherman; and next introduced Julia Ward Howe. Mrs. Howe moved onto the stage to the organ strains of "As We Go Marching On," amid the thunderous applause of the audience. She read a sentimental poem, "A Dream on the Hearthstone." After this, she announced that she had been looking at a clothes-line one day when the thought came to her that a clothes-line was like a rosary. She then

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

rendered in a peculiarly touching manner “A Thought for Wash Day.” At this juncture Gilder declared an intermission. When the audience had recovered, George W. Cable read “A School Examination at Grande Pointe,” and Bangs read two selections from *The Idiot*, a series of papers currently published in *Harper’s Bazar*. After *The Idiot* Mrs. Howe recited “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Describing Bangs’s manner on this occasion, the New York *Commercial Advertiser* said: “As Mr. Cable had been the comedian, the next comer was, par excellence, the humorist. Bangs looked exactly like a clearcut broker off the Stock Exchange. Nothing that convulsed the risibilities of Mr. Bangs’ hearers at all disturbed his. His voice was clear and his manner was as easy as if he was chatting at a bachelors’ smoker.”

Bangs was apparently getting used to public appearances; for, on another occasion earlier than this one, he had joined in a reading before a vast audience with Howells, Stockton, Henry van Dyke, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, and Mrs. Howe. He said that it made him realize, perhaps for the first time, the magnificent distances that lay between Yonkers-on-Hudson and Parnassus-by-Helicon. He became very nervous as the time came for his appearance on the platform. Mrs. Howe, noting his trepidation, approached him with that sympathetic tact and humor for which she was famous. Putting her arm through his, she said: “Oh, Mr. Bangs, I am so nervous about going out before all those

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

people that I really believe I shall have to borrow some of your manly courage to carry me through."

Beyond the provinces of club and platform, in the less organized fields of literary association, there were many casual luncheons and dinners among those who circulated about the premises of Messrs. Harper & Brothers, most of whom were contributors to the then very live *Harper's Weekly*. Stray letters and backs of old menus preserved among Bangs's posthumous papers suggest affable gastronomic communions enjoyed under varying circumstances with such writers and artists as Stockton, Howells, Richard Harding Davis, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Nelson Page, Albert Bigelow Paine, Julian Ralph, Paul du Chaillu, Brander Matthews, Mark Twain, Charles Dana Gibson, A. B. Frost, W. A. Rogers, Frederic Remington, Caspar Whitney, Walter Camp, Paul Leicester Ford, James L. Ford, David Graham Phillips, Charles Belmont Davis, Owen Wister, Theodore Roosevelt, Edward S. Martin, F. Hopkinson Smith, and J. Henry Harper.

J. Henry Harper was the leading spirit of the House of Harper, and took a particular interest in the *Weekly*. He became Bangs's most intimate life-long friend. He speaks with great warmth of his friendship with Bangs in his history *The House of Harper*, 1912, and in his memoirs *I Remember*, 1934. Harper was twelve years Bangs's senior, but he delighted in the wit of his young friend. They were continuously together. Harper considered Bangs "the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

jestor *facile princeps* of his literary generation.” “To know him intimately,” said Harper, “is to revel in the enjoyment of a good-fellowship which is of the true and tried order.” Under the genial patronage of J. Henry Harper, the House of Harper became a family affair.

Bill Nye about this time invited Bangs to a luncheon at the New York Hotel with two other friends. Nye whetted the appetites of his guests by declaring that the *pièce de résistance* was to be a bird just sent him from the West by a friend off on a hunting trip. After excellent preliminaries in the form of oysters, soup, and shad-roe, Nye turned to the waiter. “Now, Henry,” he said, “you may bring on that young eagle. I will carve it myself.”

With a great flourish Henry, accompanied by the head-waiter, placed a huge white-metal platter before Nye. The cover was lifted, and there “serenely beautiful in death, surrounded by at least two square feet of toast and water cress, lay a solitary reedbird about two inches long.” Nye, without a change of countenance or even a passing reference to the absurdity of the thing, deftly separated the bird into four pieces, dividing them between his guests and himself.

Bangs saw something of Kipling at this time. Kipling, true to his assertion that American women were superior to the girls of Devonshire and London, the damsels of France, and the Anglo-Indian *spin*, had married in 1892 the sister of the recently deceased American novelist C. Wolcott

## *Literary Associations of the Early Nineties*

Balestier, and had come to live in Vermont. In Brattleboro, the construction of his ship-like dwelling "The Naulahka" had been supervised by Henry Rutgers Marshall, who had been the architect for Bangs's Yonkers house. On one of Kipling's rare and hurried visits to New York, Marshall invited Bangs and Kipling to dine with him at the Century Club. When he introduced his guests to each other, there was a notable stiffness in their greeting. Kipling was known for a forthright demeanor sometimes amounting to brusqueness, and Marshall thought little of the situation until he and his guests were seated at table. It then became apparent that the atmosphere was anything but affable. Conversation lagged, until Marshall, in despair, was driven to talking shop. He asked his guests how they liked the houses he had built for them.

"There are only two things I don't like about mine," said Bangs.

"And what may they be?" asked Marshall.

"The inside and the outside," said Bangs.

"But I have only one objection to my house," broke in Kipling, "and that is that I ever had it built at all! But," he added, as the architect began to breathe with relief over the quickening conversation, "there is one thing about my house that I can highly praise. The plumbing is gorgeous — it's all plated!"

"That's nothing," ejaculated Bangs. "There's not a pipe in my house that is not solid!"

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

By this time the atmosphere had become more genial, and a good time was had. As a matter of fact Bangs and Kipling had met before and had agreed to have some fun at their host's expense. Bangs was once at a reception where a man expressed his surprise to Kipling on finding him so pleasant, saying that he had heard he had no manners. Kipling's apt reply was: "Sir, I have manners of all kinds in stock for those who need them. May I have your order?"

But Bangs's major business at this time was not with clubs, nor with authors' readings, nor with pleasant literary associations. Nor was it with lecturing, although he had delivered *The Evolution of the Humorist* as early as January 1891 at Music Hall, Yonkers, and had been invited subsequently to deliver it in many places elsewhere. His principal business was editing and writing for the Harper periodicals. Through these mediums his rising repute as a national humorist was becoming increasingly manifest.

## *RISING REPUTE:* COFFEE AND REPARTEE

BANGS became by necessity a student of humor. His directive positions at Harpers placed him in a sort of professorial chair of humor in a national institution. His lecture *The Evolution of the Humorist* was itself a work of considerable erudition, playfully conceived, and it delighted many learned societies. The editing of humor is a serious business. Thomas L. Masson of *Life* referred to Bangs's job at Harpers as "a mournful diversion." In editing the monthly "Drawer" and the weekly pages of the *Bazar* and *Young People*, Bangs had to be wary of old jokes and on the lookout for the new. To make sure that the jests were reasonably fresh or only moderately plagiaristic, Bangs supplied a great part of this short stuff himself, unsigned, at the rate of what he designated as \$150 a gross. Bangs paid himself one dollar a jest where he paid other contributors two. There is a letter from Frederic Remington

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

thankng Bangs for a two-dollar check for the only joke he ever sold, saying he is going to have the check framed. Bangs had the reputation of writing at this time a dozen jokes a day just for relaxation. Jokes even invaded his dreams:

I've read London *Punch* from beginning to end,  
On all comic papers much money I spend,  
But naught that is in them can ever seem bright  
Beside the rich jokes that I dream of by night.

Although Bangs had no department in *Harper's Weekly*, his connection with that periodical was intimate. His more considerable contributions to it greatly enhanced his reputation among American humorists. He was to be for twenty years its leading humorous contributor in verse and prose of great variety. In the Christmas issue of 1891, he and Rudyard Kipling and Richard Harding Davis are advertised as the leading contributors of short stories.

From 1891 through 1894, Bangs contributed fifteen stories to the *Weekly*. They were all humorous in nature and dealt mostly with ghostly themes, smiling over various phases of the supernatural, then a subject of intense interest. Agnes Repplier in the December *Atlantic*, 1894, expressed the fear that "modern ghosts are being lured to their destruction by the new semi-scientific methods of research." Their sway was as surely being imperiled by the application of humorous treatment in the field of literature. In the issue of the *Atlantic* in which Miss Repplier's

## *Rising Repute: Coffee and Repartee*

remarks were made, there also appeared the comment of a reviewer on Bangs's collection of ghost stories, *The Water Ghost and Others*. "These ghosts are the jolliest set of spooks we ever met," said the *Atlantic*. "If more uncanny spirits haunt you, they will drive them off. Though they bear you company after candle-light, they will leave only the memory of extravagant fun and farce to hover about you at bedtime."

The eight psychical tales of *The Water Ghost and Others*, collected from the pages of the *Weekly*, and published by Harper & Brothers, 1894, were enriched with illustrations by A. B. Frost, usually accounted the best graphic humorist of his time. The title story, "The Water Ghost of Harrowby Hall," which had appeared in the *Weekly* in June 1891, is ranked as a classic by authorities in the field of the supernatural in fiction. Dorothy Scarborough, author of *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, 1917, characterizes Bangs as "creator extraordinary of jovial ghosts," and the Chicago *Dial* said that to imagine such things at all was a gift, and to set them forth with their present verisimilitude was an art in its kind almost incomparable.

Though there had been a sporadic tradition of humorous ghosts in American letters since Washington Irving's "The Spectre Bridegroom" down through Poe and Hawthorne to such modern tales as Brander Matthews's "The Rival Ghosts," Stockton's "The Transferred Ghost," and Bun-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

ner's "The Recording Spook," Bangs was the first American writer to make a collection of humorous apparitions. More than any other American writer he put ghosts on a domestic basis and laughed away their terrors. As an authority on ghost-lore, Bangs illustrates the application to light and humorous literature of the treatment which ghosts had hitherto received from science. Bangs's ghosts are unique personalities, tangible spirits who appear corporally with strong will and purpose in death. A Boston critic found Bangs's tales as sparkling in their humor as Washington Irving's, in their delineation as apt, in their style somewhat similar. Why, he asks, should not the mantle of Irving fall upon Bangs, who now lives on the banks of the same river that inspired Irving to write his legends?

In his researches into the more recondite and mysterious phases of human behavior, Bangs did not limit himself to ghosts. In *Roger Camerden*, 1883, he had manifested his interest in the psychological phenomenon of double delusion. In 1893 he published in *Scribner's Magazine* a tale somewhat similar in character, "Carleton Barker, First and Second." This tale, which was later collected into *Ghosts I Have Met*, 1898, dealt with the subject of double identity. Neither Roger Camerden nor Carleton Barker were subjected to humorous treatment: they were human beings, not ghosts; and they were suffering from mental disorders. But Bangs now evolved a most remarkable tale to

## *Rising Repute: Coffee and Repartee*

designate which we can offer no scientific terminology. This was *Toppletion's Client: or, A Spirit in Exile*, published by Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., London, 1893. There was also an American edition, published by C. L. Webster & Co., the firm in which Mark Twain was partner.

There is no possibility of suggesting the amazing drollery of this story without taking pages to outline its strange plot, which the *Outlook* declared to be "one of the most extraordinary that has ever occurred to the mind of man." The story deals with the attempts of Hopkins Toppletion, a young lawyer, to recover for his only client, a disembodied spirit, that spirit's former corporeal habitation. This habitation has now, for thirty years, been occupied by a fiendish and ambitious spirit, whereas the disembodied client, now but a maudlin void lost in a vacuum, has been left without any means of actualizing himself into the phenomenal world. The ambitious fiend in his occupancy of the stolen body has not only married the client's fiancée, but has for thirty years so abused the usurped premises that there is not likely long to be much of those premises left. Toppletion at last succeeds in recovering his client's worn-out body, but unfortunately finds himself incorporated into it against his will, while the fiendish usurper goes forth to a new career clothed and revitalized by Toppletion's youthful body itself.

The London *Athenaeum* looked with some favor upon this effort of Bangs, declaring that a pure extravaganza

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

like *Toppleton's Client* came not unrefreshingly in the waste of everyday fiction, but it felt that it dragged at times and that the fooling suffered on occasion because "the American flavour was too pronounced." In America, *Toppleton's Client* created some surprise among the few who read it. The extraordinary richness of its contents was noted. "Rarely do philosophy, religion, criticism, love, politics and tomfoolery find themselves so intimate with one another as they are in these droll pages," said *The Independent*. "Yet, after all, one reads the book from beginning to end with an almost constant grin."

Neither *Toppleton's Client* nor *The Water Ghost* were more than normal successes from a sales point of view, the former selling about three thousand copies and the latter about five thousand. With *Coffee and Repartee*, published 1893, Bangs stepped forth as a humorist of national proportions, achieving immediate popular acclaim. This little book sold over fifty-four thousand copies before it was merged with *The Idiot* as *Coffee and Repartee and The Idiot*, 1900. This was accounted a very great sale for a book of its kind.

*Coffee and Repartee* was a small volume, vest-pocket size, a budget of wit and fun, and it was published in the dainty "Black and White Series" of Harpers. The *Chicago News* called it an altogether demure bit of elegance, and that about describes the book's appearance and quality, with perhaps some reservations concerning the imperti-

## *Rising Repute: Coffee and Repartee*

nences of its leading character, the Idiot. In May 1892 *Coffee and Repartee* had begun its serial appearance in the "Facetiae" of *Harper's Bazar*, where it became a popular feature. "Slip the *Bazar* out of its wrapper," said a Georgia paper, "and on the last page you will find a running series of articles by John Kendrick Bangs under the heading *Coffee and Repartee* which is a most perfect take off on that bright but somewhat egotistically written book *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. . . . You will find in them not only keen wit, but much of the polished humor and philosophy of the old school of English humorists, though the style of thought and diction is distinctively modern."

The *mise en scène* of *Coffee and Repartee* is Mrs. Smithers's highclass boarding-house for single gentlemen — such a home as was conspicuous in the middle-class life of the nineties. Among the characters are a pedagogue, a doctor, a clergyman, a genial gentleman who occasionally imbibes, a bibliomaniac, and the Idiot, who has been described as the Hamlet of the piece. Without the Idiot there would have been no amusing badinage to give verve to these sprightly sketches, for the Idiot was not only a wit in himself but the cause of wit in others. The Idiot, who reappeared in several of Bangs's books of the nineties, was to become during the first two decades of the twentieth century Bangs's most persisting *eidolon theatri* — or should we say *alter ego*? — and his opinions social and political were then to be spread

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

broadcast through the newspaper syndicates. In the nineties Bangs's *Idiot* papers remained more literary than journalistic; but the *Idiot*, from the beginning, may be said to have belonged to that traditional line of American comic characters through which our humorists since the time of Seba Smith's "Major Jack Downing" have projected their comment on American life. The *Idiot*, despite his idiotisms, was at base grounded in Yankee common-sense.

Opinions varied concerning the quality of *Coffee and Repartee*. "Mr. Bangs's wit," said one reviewer, "has much in common with the long slender Toledo blade, whose victim breathes his last before he realizes he is pierced. The *New York Times* thought it was the amusing way Bangs had of ending his sentences that made his wit so taking. The *Dial* found the humor dry and irresistible. Two Boston critics were high in praise, and two were not. The Boston *Congregationalist* felt sorry for anyone whose idea of wit involved a dissatisfied boarder insulting his landlady as often, as grossly, and as publicly, as in the case of the *Idiot*; and the *Boston Courier* condemned Mrs. Smithers's boarding-house as one from which a gentleman would flee as from a pestilence.

Mayhap some of the Boston strictures derived from the fact that the *Idiot*'s breakfast table was in a boarding-house in New York rather than, as had been the *Autocrat*'s, in Boston. This fact, said Edward S. Martin, doubtless accounted for the superior impertinence of the Bangsian con-

## *Rising Repute: Coffee and Repartee*

versation. Bangs's humor, as may be surmised, was not that of Oliver Wendell Holmes. Rather it has been described, as far as *Coffee and Repartee* is concerned, as a cross between the humor of Holmes and the humor of Nye, thus partaking of the quality of both our classical and our native strains, and therefore possibly achieving a blend more representatively American than the humor of either Holmes or Nye.

As for Bangs himself, he apparently did not take his little book very seriously. Arthur Stedman, interviewing him in 1895, for the Bacheller Syndicate, said that Bangs confessed he was always in the mood for something. "One day," said Bangs, "it may be the mood of a versifier, another it may be plagiaristic. In this mood I never use a pen but rely wholly upon my shears and my mucilage. *Coffee and Repartee* was the product of one of these hours. With *The Autocrat* in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other, I created the Idiot, and as he seems to stick in the affections of some twenty or thirty thousand people, I fancy I must have used up a great deal of mucilage."

Some commentator upon the Idiot said that Bangs deserved to be encouraged for his use of plain everyday English, because so few of our modern humorists were content to be funny without the aid of dialect. The Idiot, who was a poet as well as a wit, on one occasion indulged a satiric thrust at our dialect school of versifiers by composing an "Octet in Cigar-Box Dialect":

*John Kendrick Bangs*

O Manuel *garcia alonzo*,  
Colorado especial *H. Clay*,  
Invincible *flora alphonzo*,  
Cigarette *panatella el rey*,  
Victoria *reina selectas* —  
O twofer *madura grandé* —  
O *conchas oscuro perfectas*,  
You drive all my sorrows away.

Bangs, it may be said, was very fond of cigars, but he did not emulate Mark Twain in his confessed average of three hundred per month — except, possibly, during the campaign for mayor of Yonkers in which he now suddenly found himself embroiled.

*THREE WEEKS IN POLITICS*

**I**N March 1894, toward the close of his thirty-second year, Bangs ran for mayor of Yonkers on a Democratic ticket in a Republican year. Three weeks in politics were to lead him to the conclusion that "politics and humor seldom mix unless one happens to be a cartoonist."

Bangs's entry in politics was the result of a letter he contributed to the columns of the *Yonkers Statesman* on the subject of pension scandals. The Dependent Pension Law, fostered by the Republican Party, had so depleted the funds in the United States Treasury that when Cleveland took office in 1893 he was said to have saved the last dollar in the government's possession. Bangs alluded to the Pension Law as an Act for Fostering the Veteran Manufacturing Industry (Unlimited), and publicly accused the Republicans of having allowed the few to rob the many. They had, he said, hauled up a piratical pension flag which forced Cleveland's Secretary of the Treasury to extinguish the light in the Statue of Liberty enlightening the world.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

It was Bangs's attack upon the Republican Party that led the editor of the *Yonkers Gazette* to urge Bangs's nomination for mayor. "We know that Mr. Bangs is not running after the nomination," said the *Gazette*, "and that if he receives it there will be at least one instance in the history of our city of the office seeking the man." After some persuasion that he stand as a candidate, Bangs was duly nominated at the Democratic primaries, when he received 1327 votes against 429 for his rival, Dennis Murphy.

Dennis Murphy had been seeking the mayoralty nomination for a number of years. He had been defeated for it twice before, and on both occasions he had bolted his party and aided in electing the Republican candidate. Now, upon being denied the nomination for the third time, he protested against the nomination of Bangs on legal grounds. He complained to the inspectors of the Fifth Ward that the Bangs ticket in that ward had read "John K. Bangs" instead of "John Kendrick Bangs" as in the other wards. Because of this illegality, Dennis Murphy — obviously a man of hair-splitting conscience — declared that he would take the stump against Bangs. For years Murphy had had the bulk of the contracts for the city sewers. A successful contractor for anything so fundamental as sewers in a town of thirty thousand inhabitants could not but prove a stumbling block along the fledgling path of a candidate who had already begun his career by antagonizing the Grand Army of the

### *Three Weeks in Politics*

Republic, the Sons of Veterans, and the Loyal Legion of Grandsons of Veterans.

But Bangs's principal adversary was neither Dennis Murphy nor the Grand Army and its proliferating spawn. It was Captain John G. Peene, the Republican candidate. Peene was the owner of the Ben Franklin Line of steamers, which trafficked along the Hudson between Yonkers and New York, and he was also a coal-dealer of many years' standing. He was a man who had long been identified with the politics, interests, and growth of Yonkers. Captain Peene's business and all of his interests were centered in Yonkers, whereas it was at once widely circulated that Bangs's business activities were in New York and that he had once remarked that Yonkers was a good town in which to sleep. "Sleeping in Yonkers" became one of the principal issues of the campaign. Editorials were written on the subject. It was well-known that Captain Peene also slept in Yonkers, but the fact was emphasized that Bangs slept there as a matter of habit. One eminent Republican jurist announced that Bangs was not qualified to be mayor because he did nothing else in Yonkers but sleep. Finally, in defense of the Democratic nominee, the *Yonkers Herald* confessed: "It is truly a bad point about our candidate that he sleeps at home, but, as Mr. Bangs himself very properly says, he cannot afford under a Republican administration of municipal affairs to sleep anywhere else."

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Obviously Bangs's qualifications for office were not those best fitted for it. As the *Yonkers Statesman* very tersely put the matter, after indicating the superior qualifications of Captain Peene: "Mr. Bangs is a scholar and a gentleman, a genial friend, a graceful writer, a man of decided opinions and vigorous independent action."

The *New York Times* and *Harper's Weekly* editorially furthered Bangs's candidacy, but some other New York periodicals treated the matter with a levity which was anything but conducive to Bangs's political success. Because Bangs had risen to something of national repute as a humorist, his candidacy for mayor became a subject for amusing comment from the Atlantic to the Pacific. As a result, he got a good deal of advertising of a kind he had not sought.

The events immediately following Bangs's nomination were reported at some length. "His handsome residence," said the *New York Sun*, "was overrun with strikers, ward heelers, and vagrants, all of whom wanted to work for him for pay. Mr. Bangs had hardly finished his dinner when the door bell rang and his servant ushered in six of the most dilapidated individuals who ever tramped the streets of Yonkers. After that Broadway seemed to resemble the Bowery with tramps. The servants at the house were driven wild by the appearance of a half a hundred strikers. They swarmed into the parlor and the kitchen, and the yard was strewn with them. Mr. Bangs met the mob in his parlor, but they gathered so fast that he had to turn them out. 'Give

### *Three Weeks in Politics*

me time to realize that I have been nominated,' he said. 'If this thing is politics I will be insane before election day.'" The *Sun* intimated that Bangs was making a farce of politics, was giving money to his vagrant visitors, and was finally prostrated by the result of the invasion.

Bangs didn't make a farce of politics, for he was not the sort of person to take his civic duties lightly. However, once his active participation in the campaign had ceased, he made a farce out of his political experiences. He published, in the Harper "Black and White Series," June 1894, *Three Weeks in Politics*, which sold fourteen thousand copies. In this way he paid his campaign expenses. In this little political satire, a textbook on how to lose votes, Bangs revived the Idiot, who regaled his companions of the breakfast table with the story of Thaddeus Perkins's race for mayor of Phillipseburg-on-the-Dunwoodie. The Idiot had gone to Phillipseburg to aid Thaddeus during the campaign and the story he tells gives evidence that the political careers of Perkins and Bangs were one and the same. Here we have, in effect, Bangs's comic spirit, the Idiot, commenting upon Bangs the conventional citizen, Thaddeus Perkins.

Speaking of Thaddeus Perkins, who like Bangs was a poet of sorts, the Idiot says that in the beginning he was a very tractable candidate, but "as the campaign proceeded he acquired a nerve which in office would be fine, but which, in a contest for office, is the last thing a man ought to have."

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

It was the Idiot's opinion that a candidate who is to come out like a lion, must go in like a lamb, and retain his lamb-like quality until after the votes are counted. He can then be any animal he pleases. But Thaddeus, said the Idiot, was a lamb the first week, a bear the second, and a perfect hyena the third. "The second week he seemed to be cultivating a reserve which was encouraging to his friends who didn't want him elected. He could have worn overalls and brogans that second week without helping his cause a bit. He had a full-dress manner about him which all the overalls and brogans in the world could not have counteracted. Candidates, politicians, voters calling upon him were received, and no more. He didn't try to hit anybody, but it was evident that he was yearning for the independence of the poet, and for people calling on campaign business his house took on many of the qualities of a first-class refrigerator." "I verily believe," said the Idiot, "that a dozen kegs of beer and a little self-denial in the matter of wearing a new silk hat and patent-leather shoes everywhere he went would have changed the result."

On election day the press of New York smilingly awaited the result of the voting in Yonkers. Reporters came early to town to gather such comedy as was forthcoming. The *Sun* led off with a poem, "At Yonkers on Hudson," of which the first of seven stanzas is exemplary:

Who is your choice at Yonkers?  
Who is your choice we say?

### *Three Weeks in Politics*

Who is your choice for Mayor?

Who is your choice to-day?

And up from the mouths of cannon,

In loud resounding clangs,

The echoes come

With a walloping bum:

Bangs,

Bangs,

Bangs!

The *Times*, the following morning, reported that Candidate Bangs had been up and about bright and early election day, and that he had sipped his Mocha at breakfast as unconcernedly as if he were not on the ticket. It implied that Bangs had a premonition of his defeat, reporting that as he stepped from his porch he buttoned his blue overcoat about him and remarked that it might be a "cold day" for somebody. "After luncheon . . . Mr. Bangs made a tour of the polls in a handsome carriage. Two neighbors accompanied him. He was as cheerful as the sunshine that danced on the Hudson and as breezy as the gusts that swept the Palisades. Everywhere cordial greetings awaited him. The aristocrats of Palisade Avenue, Broadway, and Ashburton Avenue were not more amiably disposed than the workers in Orchard Street and on the 'flats.' On the heights the women manifested a lively interest in the fight. . . . Many a fair Yonkers matron exacted a promise from her sovereign lord and master that he would vote for Bangs before taking the train for town."

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Meantime the practical politicians were hard at work all day, getting out the vote. They found some apathy in the manufacturing districts, where many persons were out of work. The Republicans were in a furtive way trying to make a point of industrial depression. "They did not go so far as to charge Mr. Bangs with bringing on hard times. They only said that a Republican Mayor in Yonkers would be a verdict for protection and a protest against tariff reform. What the Mayor of Yonkers had to do with the tariff they did not explain."

With reference to the tariff and its effect upon carpet-manufacturing, the main industry of Yonkers, it is hinted that Bangs's preference for goods of foreign manufacture, including Persian rugs, was a minor factor in his defeat. The Idiot said that Thaddeus Perkins, according to common report, had a special aversion to all things American: "He had Persian and Turkish rugs on his floors; Bohemian glass on his table; French pictures on his walls; he wore English clothes, imported hats, and, worst of all, had once spoken publicly upon the importance of English in the public schools. His love of imported rugs and glass and clothes and pictures was entirely due to his hatred of American workingmen. He loved to see workingmen starve. If he had been asked to explain the difference between an ingrain carpet of American make and a Persian rug he couldn't have done it, which proved that he chose the latter out of pure cussedness. The people couldn't understand

### *Three Weeks in Politics*

why he preferred to drink out of a goblet of Bohemian pattern, which if carelessly dropped on the floor would shiver into countless atoms, rather than have an American tumbler at less expense that could be thrown down three flights of stairs onto a marble floor without even cracking, unless the preference were due to an unholy desire to see foreigners thrive and his fellow-countrymen falling of hunger. The workingmen of Phillipseburg were made to believe that the election of Perkins meant the entire cessation of labor in the community; and as many of them were told so by their employers, who have been carrying on their respective businesses for philanthropic reasons only for many years, they found it advisable to believe it, and again Perkins suffered."

The close of election day found Candidate Bangs, according to the *Times*, dining "imperturbably at his North Broadway residence. He declined to talk about the election further than to say that it would speak for itself when the returns came in." And, later in the evening, when the returns came in, Bangs was running ahead of his own ticket, but the opposite ticket was running ahead of him. Captain Peene had won the race by 2941 votes to Bangs's 2734, a majority of 207.

Bangs had hardly learned the news when he was still more forcibly apprised of his fate by a clamor of whistles down on the Hudson. "As soon as the result was announced," said the *New York Tribune*, "the whistles on the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

tugs and steamboats of the Ben Franklin Line . . . were blown, and they continued to blow as long as there was steam in the boilers. Then the firemen threw on more coal, and there was more blowing. This was repeated time and time again." Rejected Bangs, sitting in his library and smoking a cigar, was interrupted in the midst of this harsh music by the ting-a-ling of his telephone. It was the *New York World* calling for the latest information:

"I did not get there," said Bangs.

"To what do you attribute your defeat?" asked the *World*.

"Not enough votes," said Bangs.

The headlines in the New York papers the next day were in honor of the losing candidate: HUMORIST BANGS FALLS IN YONKERS; POET BANGS DEFEATED; YONKERS JUST MISSED IT; A GOOD JOKE ON J. K. BANGS; JOY IN YONKERS; BANGS MAY STILL BE FUNNY. And if Bangs had no whistles to celebrate his defeat such as Captain Peene had to celebrate his victory, there yet were elegiac poems written to console him, especially in the *Sun*, where "The Crime at Yonkers" carried a stanza suggesting noises as cacophonous as those accorded the Captain himself:

From cairn and tomb and abbey room  
old poets came a-growling,  
Minstrelmen and gleemen raise  
a wondrous sound of howling,



Rejected Bangs!

REJECTED BANGS

*From the New York Press, 1894*



### *Three Weeks in Politics*

What sobs and hoots from horns and lutes,  
    what tears the strings befouling,  
What ghostly thrums and devilish drums,  
    and cracked sepulchral yowling.  
“ Now, by the mass, 'tis a grievous pass  
    when a knight of our order is sent to grass:  
Howl, all ye Apollonian gangs,  
    They've beaten Bangs! ”

After Bangs's defeat there was widespread speculation as to its cause. The simple statement which attributed his failure to an insufficient number of votes did not satisfy the curious. The *Chicago Tribune* circulated the report that Bangs's own poor jokes had defeated him, that his enemies had circulated hundreds of copies of *Harper's Magazine* for April with the execrable humor of the "Drawer" marked. Approximating this report was that of the *New York Advertiser*: "Cultured Yonkers has set its seal of condemnation upon the last page of *Harper's Bazar*. 'Tear him for his bad verses!' cried the citizens of Rome when they set upon Cinna, the poet. This apparently was the sentiment of the electors of Yonkers." But the *Springfield Union* put the cause of defeat on other ground. "It is suspected," said the *Union*, "that John Kendrick Bangs lost the election at Yonkers through the influence of disappointed humorists whose productions he had unceremoniously thrown into the waste basket."

The *Journal* of Lincoln, Nebraska, charged defeat against

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

one of Bangs's literary friends who, in making a speech on his behalf, had referred to him as "a son of the Muses and a native of Parnassus." This did not go very big with the Irish constituency that heard it. Bangs had been posing as a native of Yonkers, and he was now suspected of being not only a fraud but a foreigner. Another sheet, closer to the source of information, laid the defeat to a want of free beer, and preached a complimentary sermon upon the text:

When drink prevails and impious men have sway,  
The post of honor is a private station.

There is no doubt that Bangs could have had the victory had he cared "to paddle his political canoe across a sea of whiskey." He could have had it also had he not refused on election eve to open his home as a beer garden for a local German band that marched up Broadway to serenade him. The votes of the band and its heelers would have been enough to turn the scale. But little Francis was asleep upstairs in the nursery, and was not to be disturbed.

*POPULAR AUTHOR:  
MID-NINETIES' MISCELLANY*

AFTER his political defeat there was some talk of nominating Bangs for Congress, but he had had enough of politics. He had become through painful experience a profound believer in early political vaccination against overweening ambition. Like Thaddeus Perkins he now knew how a prisoner felt who had expected a sentence of two years and had been let off with thirty days. The only thing Bangs cared to run for in the future was the 9:05 train to New York in the mornings. Even the offer of one of the most lucrative consulships in Europe, extended by Grover Cleveland, could not tempt Bangs from private life. He had three sons and he wished to rear them as Americans. He was content to sleep in Yonkers and to serve the town of his nativity in such small ways as were permitted him.

During the campaign for mayor the socially élite of the town had elected Bangs president of the Yonkers Lawn

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Tennis Club. The members had hoped to have their president the mayor of the city. It would have brought special glamour to their annual ball. Bangs, regretful over the disappointment he had caused the club, consoled it as best he could. He imported to Yonkers celebrities for its entertainment, among them such romantic figures as Arthur Conan Doyle, Richard Harding Davis, Charles Dana Gibson, and Anthony Hope Hawkins.

Soon, in addition to president of the Tennis Club, Bangs became president of the Halsted School, Yonkers's leading private institution of learning. To this school he was to contribute three sons and more money than he could afford. At about the same time Mayor Peene had the graciousness to appoint him vice-president of the Yonkers Board of Education, which increased still further, though only fractionally, his presidential standing in the community. Still later he became diplomat extraordinary to Andrew Carnegie and was entrusted with the task of persuading that eminent builder of literary mausoleums to give Yonkers a handsome public library. The library stands, a monument to Carnegie's generosity and to Bangs's assiduity.

The quality of the satire in Bangs's political primer *Three Weeks in Politics* has been sufficiently represented by quotation. Two other literary productions, "The Mayor's Lamps" and "The Nemesis of Perkins," stories published in *Harper's Magazine*, 1896, and later collected into

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

*The Booming of Acre Hill*, 1900, derived from Bangs's political experiences in Yonkers. They are plain tales based on actualities. In June 1894 there also began, in *Harper's Bazar*, a sequel to *Coffee and Repartee*, twelve papers subsequently published in book-form, 1895, as *The Idiot*. It was at this time that Bangs, having already attained considerable success, resolved that "Given an active right hand, an imagination, and a firm opinion of oneself, there is no reason in the world why one should not ultimately become a successful author." He was at once to illustrate the truth of this resolve by becoming for the two years 1895-1896 the most frequently mentioned American author in the best-seller lists of *The Bookman*.

The leading rival of *Harper's Bazar* at this time among female journals was *The Ladies' Home Journal*, since 1889 under the editorship of Edward W. Bok. Even in 1889 this journal was said to have a larger circulation than any other periodical in America, boasting half a million paid-in-advance subscribers. Bok, who was ever quick to recognize rising popularity and equally quick to further it, immediately arranged with Bangs for a series of conversational sketches somewhat akin to *The Idiot*. These papers, twelve of them, under the general title of "The Paradise Club" began in *The Ladies' Home Journal* December 1894 and were one of its leading features through the year 1895. The Paradise Club received its name from the fact that

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

neither woman nor serpent ever entered its precincts. The papers consisted of the club talk of four men on questions of the day affecting women and their interests.

Bok was a good man for anyone to have as a press-agent. His methods, in addition to the customary one of advertising his wares in other journals, were interesting. Since the death of P. T. Barnum in 1891, Bok had succeeded to the showman's laurels as America's foremost advertising genius — for Elbert Hubbard had not yet gotten started. Indeed, Hubbard was, as late as the autumn of 1894, still trying to win a belated education at Harvard. But he was sickening of the attempt, and was spending, as he put it, "many hours of sweet forgetfulness" in the works of Bangs, and writing him with gratitude for all the smiles he had caused him.

Bok, on the other hand, had already for some years been practising the art of engaging the attention of an ever-widening range of readers. According to Wilberforce Jenkins, a pseudonymous projection of Bangs, Bok had collected autographs for twenty years and thus familiarized himself with the great names of the United States. In 1890 he had "invented the Heart to Heart Talk, a department of intimacy by means of which the young everywhere were taught the etiquette of the front stoop and the back piazza. In 1894 he had established the Ladies' Home Society of Utilitarianism, the object of which was to demonstrate the Further Utility of Useless Things. Under the instruction of this Society thousands of American ladies had been taught how

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

to turn their husbands' silk hats into waste baskets and their own cast off clothing into Christmas gifts for their grandmothers."

Considering the character of Bok's genius and his passion for intimacy, we are not surprised to find him trying to find out something intimate about Bangs. Leaking from the "Fresh Gossip from the Literary World" department of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, there appeared in a Boston journal an item about Bangs's love of flowers, in which Mr. Bok informed the world that Bangs preferred wild flowers to tame ones, quoting him as saying: "A great many beautiful products of nature which man in his conceit calls weeds, because they are independent enough to take care of themselves, are to me far more attractive than such horticultural freaks as orchids and that shock-headed ill-smelling monstrosity, the chrysanthemum."

Turning from horticulture to gastronomy, Bok next announced that Bangs had invented a new dietetic delicacy called the Rothschild Sandwich. It was not called the Bangs Sandwich because it was far richer than Bangs ever hoped to be. The recipe, according to Bok, was: "Take a breakfast biscuit or English muffin. Cut it in two slices. Butter each slice with pure unsalted butter. Then place upon the butter of each slice a thin layer of Roquefort cheese. Upon one of the slices lay a half dozen farcie olives dripping with their oil, and place the other slice on top of them. Then eat the result, and if you don't say the pleasure of eating it

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

is worth the headache you are likely to have next morning, you are not a true epicure."

In the August 1894 issue of his *Journal* Bok devoted a page of comment with photographic portraits to "Four Famous Young Authors Who Have Achieved Fame Before or in Their Thirtieth Year." The four young authors were Davis, Kipling, Bangs, and Jerome K. Jerome. "I hope some thoughtful person will send a copy to Mr. Kipling," said *Town Topics*. "If I know his gentle and pigeon-livered nature . . . he will utter ejaculations as warm and numerous as ever came from the lips of Mulvaney in the burning, beerless noon of India. Yet his mood will be entirely unjustifiable. . . . He ought to rejoice that the condition of literature is so much improved that Mr. Bangs and Mr. Davis are more famous than Shakespeare was at their age."

It was by these methods, pertinent or impertinent to literature, that Bok created human interest regarding the authors who wrote for his remarkable journal. An anecdote which Bok circulated at this time, and later included in his autobiography, *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, 1920, dealt with a visit of Richard Harding Davis to Yonkers, where he had been invited by Bangs to join in an author's reading. Bok says: "Davis had never read to an audience before, and was at a loss how to respond to his friend's injunction to 'give them something unique.' An idea, however, occurred to him, and he resolved to carry it out. When his turn came to interest his audience he announced that he

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

would read a portion of an unpublished story written by himself. Immediately there was a flutter in the audience, particularly among the younger element. Coughing down the natural embarrassment of facing an audience for the first time and taking a roll of manuscript out of his pocket, he began: 'It was a fine, sunny, showery day in April. The big studio window —.' At this point the entire audience broke into a shout of laughter and applause, and the reader had the curious satisfaction of finding out how thoroughly familiar the story of *Trilby* had become, even by a mere recital of thirteen of its opening words."

The occasion upon which Davis made this test of the reading public's memory was one of those affairs by which Bangs brought consolation to the Yonkers Tennis Club. The group who furnished entertainment on this evening were Davis, Charles Dana Gibson, Robert Bridges of *Life*, and Robert Howard Russell, with Bangs presiding. Bridges read pieces from his *Suppressed Chapters*, 1895, one of his offerings being "Buy the Idiot Brand," a take-off on Bangs's well-known literary character. Russell read "The Pacha's Levee," which, illustrated by Gibson, Bangs published as the leader in the "Drawer" of *Harper's*, July 1895. Gibson amused the audience with brilliant lightning sketches on large sheets of paper, showing how he drew his famous creations and intermingling Gibson girls and Gibson men with caricatures of his friends on the platform.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

At dinner preceding the entertainment, Davis took a pencil from his pocket and wrote his name in large letters on Mrs. Bangs's handsomest table-cloth. He turned to her, and smilingly observed: "Some people have that embroidered." Mrs. Bangs, who was not impressed, with difficulty refrained from replying: "Well, I shall have it laundered!" This story was suppressed, lest Davis's character suffer. Davis had for some years been accused of having a swelled-head, and the relation of this episode might have lent the color of truth to the allegation.

Davis stood in the very forefront of popular American authors of the nineties. His *Princess Aline* was a romantic success of 1895. He could not keep his chest in, nor dull his own luster, and so it came to pass that the mediocre considered him conceited. But there were those who knew him intimately and averred that this was not so. As Wilberforce Jenkins put it, the only trouble with Davis was that he had been born in 1864, had reached the age of twenty-one in 1890, and had grown older at the rate of one year in five ever since.

Conan Doyle came to America in October 1894 and gave forty public readings. His *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* had been a serial feature in *Harper's Weekly* in 1893. He was much admired on his American visit for his manliness. One of his readings was given at the Yonkers Tennis Club, and while in Yonkers he visited Bangs. On the evening of his arrival he was down for dinner before his host and host-

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

ess, and he went into the library to attend them. Bangs, descending the stairs a little later, witnessed a courtesy perpetrated upon Doyle by his eldest son. As Bangs crossed the hall to the wide doorway of the library, he saw the back of Doyle's head above the plush comfort of a chair which had been drawn up before a blazing fire on the library hearth. At the same moment he was shocked to see his son move swiftly upon Doyle from the rear, and, with a Golly-wog Doll poised on high, bring it down upon the crown of the distinguished creator of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle like a flash seized the boy and went to the floor in a wrestling match, easily bringing the attacking party to complete subjection. Looking up and smiling, Doyle eternally subjected Bangs also. "Oh, never mind, Mr. Bangs," he said. "This is only another example of the irrepressible conflict between Old England and Young America!"

The irrepressible conflict between Old England and Young America, however, rather bothered Doyle. He was a strong believer in Anglo-Saxon solidarity, and he regretted greatly a hostility which he found in America to things British, especially the antagonisms created by the methods of teaching history in the public schools. Later, when the Spanish-American War came, he expressed his attitude in a letter to Bangs. Bangs had been visiting Doyle at his home in Surrey, and war had been declared during his return to America. The letter has special pertinency today in the following passage: "So war has really come!"

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

It will at least do good to that Anglo-American Alliance which so many of us have at heart. The true United States are the States which speak English — by their tongue ye shall know them. Of course we were divided in your civil war, since you also were divided. But now against the foreigner we are solid, and that would become more evident to you if your foe were a formidable one. Let us have a Continental Coalition against you, or any sign of one, and see the Anglo-Saxon rally! But I hope it will have the effect of stopping the silly ‘tail-twisting’ which has gone on so long. All that is forgotten and forgiven when the Racial question is at stake.”

In Bangs’s library, a handsome fireplace, over the mantel of which was a replica in plaster of horses from the Parthenon, bore the tessellated inscription *Hic Habitat Felicitas*. Before a fire on its hearth Bangs and Doyle sat late into a night talking of Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, and other matters, with such felicity that Doyle never forgot it. Some time later, when Bangs visited him near Haslemere, thirty miles from London, Doyle, to make the welcome more homelike, took pains to procure the same kind of wood that Bangs had burned on his hearth that evening in Yonkers. Doyle was disappointed when Bangs did not notice the familiar aroma of the burning wood. A wood fire of the kind was very unusual in England, however commonplace it may have been in the United States.

While at Yonkers Doyle and Bangs played the St. An-

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

drew's golf-course. Bangs was an early member of the St. Andrew's Club, the first of its kind in the country. The "Old Apple Tree Gang" of North Broadway had organized the club in 1888, and John Reid, the father of American golf, was its leading figure. Bangs and Andrew Carnegie were among those who joined the club in the spring of 1889. Bangs was never an expert at the game, but he won occasional cups in handicap tournaments, and now and then made literary capital out of the game. The "Drawer" of *Harper's* was full of the humors of golf when golfing came into full swing in the late nineties.

Objurgation and swearing seem to have been part and parcel of the game of golf in those days. One of Bangs's golfing companions for two summers at Newport was Robert Grant. "There was always a doubt which would play worse than the other," said Grant, in his autobiography *Fourscore*, 1934. "Accordingly our contests never failed to be exciting and out of them and a similarity of tastes a warm friendship developed. I have still a set of [Bangs's] books most cordially inscribed, and much enjoyed the ready, kindly wit that enlivened his conversation. I well recall his devising a set of humorous terms to take the place of expletives on the golf links when we were in hearing of our alert children." Bangs and Grant won, as prizes of victory, copies of each other's books until each had a complete set of the other's writings. Grant's inscription in one of Bangs's trophies is significant in this connection:

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

To John Kendrick Bangs,

whose I! 14! 28! and other flowers of speech on the Newport Golf Links have been a constant comfort, this volume is presented by his defeated fellow golfiac.

— Robert Grant

J. Henry Harper, in *The House of Harper*, tells of an occasion when he invited Bangs to lunch with him and an English friend, who had just arrived in New York. After luncheon they went to Ardsley to play golf, and some time later Harper received the following bill:

Ardsley, Nov. 12, 1897.

Mr. J. Henry Harper

To the Bangs Entertainment Co., Dr.

.....  
Oct. 9

Entertaining one Englishman eight hours	
@ \$10 .....	\$80
Entertaining one Publisher eight hours @	
\$2 .....	16
Laughing at Englishman's jokes .....	75
Jests supplied at luncheon .....	2.50
One brassey, broken while playing golf with Englishman .....	2
Disbursements, Link cards, Caddies, Scotches & Soda .....	10.28
	<hr/>
	\$185.78

*Please remit*

It was in the autumn of 1897 that Anthony Hope Hawkins came to America for a lecture tour. He, too, was in-

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

vited to lecture for the delectation of the Tennis Club. The night of his engagement found him hastening to Yonkers for dinner on a rather late train. Between the Yonkers Railway Station and the residence of Bangs, he attempted, while riding in a cab, to change into evening clothes so that he might not delay the dinner on his arrival. The transit up North Broadway, despite its hills, was accomplished with a speed which had not been expected, and Hawkins arrived at Bangs's door in a somewhat mixed state of clothing. He managed to make a very good appearance in his middle and upper sections, but his socks were colorfully plaid and shoeless, and he was introduced to the guests in something of a state of paraphernaliac consternation.

Anthony Hope was much impressed by the American gift for after-dinner speaking. He said he found in every city speakers who would have made a special name for themselves in England. Chauncey Depew, he said, was the acknowledged king of this art, but many others were not far behind him. This is high praise from an Englishman concerning the height of American civilization in the nineties. The art of the spoken word is as great as that of the written, even though it be perishable.

It was in the mid-nineties that Bangs began to win acclaim as an after-dinner speaker. His appearance at large banquets in New York was frequent, and he was often saved as the *bonne bouche* for the close. He was the post-prandial companion of such practitioners as Parke Godwin,

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Joseph Choate, Elihu Root, Bishop Potter, Depew, and General Horace Porter. J. Henry Harper said that Bangs once received "a request from some one out West to write for him a postprandial speech, and in his reply he said that his usual price to such men as Senator Depew and Gen. Horace Porter was so and so, but that for a beginner, who might not do him credit, it would be much larger, and then named an impossible amount, which had the desired effect, as the correspondence was thereby concluded." This episode had another termination according to some reports, for it was said that the day on which Bangs's reply reached its destination in the West, he received a telegram reading: "Your letter just received. If Chauncey Depew's speeches are written by you, then I don't want one at any price."

During these years Bangs was lecturing and reading before enthusiastic audiences. "Yale Music Hall," reports the *New Haven Journal Courier*, 1895, "was completely filled last evening with one of New Haven's most intelligent audiences to hear John Kendrick Bangs, the well-known humorist, speak on *The Evolution of the Humorist*. Mr. Bangs has achieved a reputation almost world-wide from his published works, his connection with *Harper's Weekly*, and the recent publication of *Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica*. As soon as he entered the hall last evening he was greeted with tumultuous applause, which continued for some moments, and burst forth at intervals during the lecture. . . . At the

## *Popular Author: Mid-Nineties' Miscellany*

conclusion a reception was given to Mr. Bangs by members of the Yale Phi Beta Kappa Society."

Bangs appears to have had a faculty for disseminating anecdotes in his passage through the world. We cite this visit to New Haven as a case in point. Thirty years after the event, the writer of this book, attending banquets in New Haven, heard references made to the occasion. William Lyon Phelps, who was in 1895 an instructor in Yale and already challenging attention beyond academic walls by his championship of modern literature, quotes in his book *Reading the Bible*, 1919, a jest which Bangs delivered himself of on that evening in Yale Music Hall. The jest had to do with Samson, the great practical joker of antiquity, whose final joke brought down the house. Phelps was rebuked by a critic for so lowering academic prestige as to quote Bangs in connection with Biblical matters.

Lewis Sheldon Welch and Walter Camp, in their extended history, *Yale, Her Campus, Class Rooms, and Athletics*, 1899, open their consideration of Yale as the Mother of Men with a story by which Bangs, they say, commended himself to his audience that evening. It appears that Bangs's youngest son had the habit of asking his father to bring to him, from whatever point his travels took him, a peculiar product of the place. Shortly before his visit to New Haven, Bangs had been to Florida and had brought back to the banks of the Hudson an alligator. On setting out for his

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

lecture in New Haven, the customary parting conversation with his bothersome son had been:

Where are you going, Papa?  
To New Haven, my boy.  
What do they make at New Haven, Papa?  
Yale men, my son.  
Bring me one, Papa.

The tumultuous applause which greeted Bangs in Yale Music Hall may be taken as symbolic of the reception accorded his books by the American reading public in the heart of the nineties. At this time Bangs came forward as America's popular humorist. Rising to national popularity with *Coffee and Repartee* in 1893, he enjoyed successively great success with *Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica* in 1895, *A House-Boat on the Styx* in 1896, and *The Pursuit of the House-Boat* in 1897. During the first five years of its existence, 1895–1899 inclusive, *The Bookman* in its best-seller lists accords no other American humorist the popularity it accords Bangs. There is good reason on this ground alone to award Bangs the title: "Humorist of the Nineties."

## A HOUSE-BOAT ON THE STYX, *AND OTHERS*

**S**HORTLY after the publication of *The Idiot* early in 1895, Bangs wrote a burlesque biography, *Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica*. The year 1894 had been a Napoleonic one. Lives of Napoleon and special articles upon him had run in the *Century*, the *Cosmopolitan*, and *McClure's*. Napoleon had for some time been one of Bangs's favorite historical characters. His library contained many volumes on Napoleon, and among them were items from the personal library of the Emperor himself. Bangs took pen in hand and wrote out of a full mind a life of Napoleon for his own delight. "Yes," he said, on being interviewed, "I have written a life of Napoleon Bonaparte. How did I happen to do it? Well, I do not like to be conspicuous. Everybody else was doing it, and I thought I might as well follow the crowd."

*Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica* was written, illustrated, and

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

published, within a period of four weeks. Appearing in March, when *The Idiot* stood in second place among books of American authorship in the best-seller lists, it forthwith tied *The Idiot* for that position in April, and itself took second place in May. The popularity of *Mr. Bonaparte* owed much to the profuse comic illustrations of H. W. McVickar. It was sumptuously illustrated with over one hundred and sixty drawings by the society satirist, who here exhibited talents in a new vein. “If Mr. Bangs has stripped off the masks,” said Laurence Hutton, “Mr. McVickar has put on the cocked hats and the fancy dresses. He follows the progression of costume from the uniforms of the Little Corporal, of the fighting General, of the First Consul, to the Imperial robes, with considerable accuracy, and with very slight exaggeration. He shows us the bald-headed baby, the flowing long-locked young soldier of fortune; and by degrees he cuts Bonaparte’s hair, until he presents him as the comparatively close-cropped and semi-bald Napoleon the First.”

Hutton found that Bangs and McVickar approached their subject in a spirit of comic reverence and humorous truth. Indeed, the imperial nonsense of Bangs and McVickar was appreciated even in the most erudite circles, the Boston *Journal of Education* declaring: “Napoleon is the fad of the hour, and of all the ‘lives,’ essays, and campaigns thus far produced this is the most fascinating and possibly the most true to life. The scoffer will say that it is carica-

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

ture, but, like all of its kind, it but magnifies glaring characteristics. . . . Through it all Mr. Bangs has touched off and touched up the individuality of every character in European life at that time. If we were to choose any one book of all the products of the times that is not to be missed, it would be this easily-mastered and much-enjoyed book. It is not a bore, and that is saying much of Napoleonic literature. It is not exuberant, and that is saying more yet."

At the close of *Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica*, Napoleon had captured the throne of Apollyon and himself become Napollyon, Emperor of Hades. It should not surprise us, then, that Bangs — currently dubbed by *Life* "Mr. Bonaparte of Yonkers" — should in his next book, *A House-Boat on the Styx*, annex Hades as a province of American humor. By so doing, according to a recent textbook on Classical Mythology, Bangs has put himself in the succession of Homer, Vergil, and Dante, as a major historian of the Lower Regions. And with all due respect to the poetic magnitude of his illustrious predecessors, Bangs's creation is from a rational point of view not an inferior one.

In ancient times, and in excellent Greek, Lucian of Samosata had introduced rationality into the region of the Styx. His *Dialogues of the Dead*, of the Second Century, A.D., contain much pleasing levity at the expense of the shams and follies of his day. Diogenes, who is mostly his spokesman, carries on conversations with Charon and others, and exhibits a remarkably modern temper. Lucian was of the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

literary lineage of Aristophanes, who, it will be recalled, had in *The Frogs* enlivened the ancient Plutonian realm with much buffoonery and burlesque, intermingled with telling satire and literary criticism. Lucian is said to have fused Comedy and Dialogue into a new literary form, the purpose of which was, like Comedy, to entertain, and, like Dialogue, to be read rather than to be acted. And to the tradition of Lucian, *A House-Boat on the Styx* may be said to belong.

It was not the intent of either of these classic masters of the comic, Aristophanes, or Lucian, to permanently mitigate with laughter the dismal character of the underworld, or to ameliorate conditions there for happier human habitation. The chorus of frogs still croaks its cacophonous chant in the Aristophanic Hades, and, among Lucian's dead, the wit of Diogenes the Cynic remains, as it had been in the upper world, caustic rather than genial. It is only in the Bangsian Hades that one may hear merry peals of laughter ring out across the dark waters of the Styx, ever and anon punctuated with the popping of corks and clink of glasses, and, while listening to a spirit-band discoursing sweet music under the direction of Mozart, know that at last the Infernal Realms have been permanently humanized.

Like many gentlemen before him, Bangs had been inclined to doubt that it was part of a Divine Scheme to call man into being largely for the purpose of providing fuel for Satan. The state of affairs had long had its ludicrous aspects. Yet Bangs appears to have been the first person

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

in modern literary history to introduce sweetness and light and laughter on any scale into the erstwhile unhappy territory. True, an Olympian rout had entered Hades when Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* had engaged the rapt attention of Paris in 1857, but in this case it was the classical deities, not humanity, that made merry — and the invasion had been temporary.

To turn to more practical considerations, the fact that *A House-Boat on the Styx*, shortly after its publication, became for a time the most popular book in America, is a national social consideration of no small importance. That an America, slowly emerging from "theologic cramp," which in the old days had dismally sat before the winter fire shuddering over the Calvinistic horrors of Michael Wigglesworth's seventeenth century best-seller, *The Day of Doom*, should in 1896 take to its bosom *A House-Boat on the Styx*, in which the terrors of Hell are at last laughed away, is a sign and a symbol — for Hell was a long time being humanized. If Cervantes can be said to have laughed Chivalry away — and so it is averred — Bangs, with equal truth, may be said to have done the same for Fire and Brimstone. That the whole matter is comic does in no way lessen, but rather augments, the significance. When we recall that but a century earlier a Methodist minister could without fear of contradiction thunder at Nathan Bangs the fact that there was no laughter in Hell, the change that Bangs wrought in the constitution of that fearful kingdom may be accounted

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

little less than revolutionary. Indeed, the change was so great that another Methodist minister, sometime after the publication of the *House-Boat*, gratefully introduced himself and his wife to Bangs, and told him that at first he had hesitated to marry but that upon finding Hell so charming in the *House-Boat* he had been given courage to try matrimony.

*A House-Boat on the Styx* was the result of an invitation offered Bangs by an English friend who asked him to join a party in his house-boat on a trip from London to Henley-on-the-Thames. Bangs wrote his friend regretting that the only trip of that kind which he would ever take would probably be in a house-boat on the River Styx. Immediately the idea grew, and Bangs was hospitable to it. He had already published in *The Water Ghost and Others* a tale called "The Ghost Club." Therein Davy Crockett had talked with Noah, and Dr. Johnson had bullied King Solomon. Therein, also, Napoleon had buttonholed the Duke of Wellington and asked him how he managed to win the battle of Waterloo, only to discover that the Iron Duke was as ignorant in the matter as was he himself. The Ghost Club had had no such charming habitation as a house-boat on the Styx, and so Bangs merely transferred it, for the sake of a more permanent background, to the newly conceived abode.

The Hadean humors soon thereafter began their serial appearance in the pages of *Harper's Weekly*, August 1895; and, as the *Brooklyn Standard-Union* said, "instructed

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

and edified an otherwise dull summer." Published in book-form in late November, *A House-Boat on the Styx* began its rise to prominence among the best-sellers in December, and in January and February, 1896, led the lists in *The Bookman*. It was the first American book to arrive at such a distinction, as primary place through 1895 had been held successively by Du Maurier's *Trilby*, and Ian Maclaren's two volumes, *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* and *In the Days of Auld Lang Syne*. No other American book in the nineties distinctively designated as humorous was ever so received.

When the *House-Boat* first appeared, Christian journals were somewhat hesitant as to how to take it, mild as its humor now seems. "The book tends to belittle the future life," said the *Christian Intelligencer*, "to give it a humorous aspect, to take from it all seriousness." And the *Western Christian Advocate* said that "John Kendrick Bangs, lineally descended from Nathan Bangs, Doctor of Divinity, whose portraits impress a modern person as one of the profoundest and most solemn theologians of a past generation — distinguishes himself by literary achievements that must make his grandfather miserable." The *New York Tribune*, however, felt that "if John Kendrick Bangs were to meet his grandfather, he would probably slap him on the back and ask him to have a cigar."

This casual utterance of the *Tribune* anent Bangs's possible reception of his profoundly theological but thor-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

oughly human grandfather, is not insignificant. It takes cognizance of a spirit of camaraderie in the humorist's make-up, which, in turn, accounts for much of the geniality which pervades *A House-Boat on the Styx*. In Bangs's *House-Boat* many of the great figures of history are removed from their pedestals and are once more permitted, gratefully, to act more like the human beings that they were — or, at least, that they ought to have been. In the process, though treated with familiarity, there is no breeding of contempt.

The atmosphere of warm human association that pervades *A House-Boat on the Styx* gives the book a quality of its own. The atmospheric quality is, in fact, akin to that of a genial and delightful club. It carries into literature something of the intimate spirit which was manifest in the club life of the nineties, when those institutions, as we have already intimated, seem to have enjoyed an especial vitality.

To recall some of the doings in the club life of the nineties will make more evident the fact that Bangs transferred the spirit he found there into the region of the Styx. In the *House-Boat* there is a chapter entitled "Story-Tellers' Night," in which Dr. Johnson presided, while various of the Associated Shades — Oliver Goldsmith, Baron Munchausen, and others — attempted to entertain the Immortal Company. This is a humorous reflection or prospection of such evenings as were taking place at the Aldine Club. At

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

these evenings Bangs appears to have been in fairly regular attendance. Robert Bridges, a member of the Committee which had originated the Story Tellers' Nights, recollects that Bangs had something to do always because he was facile and amusing. Bridges particularly recalls one of these evenings in 1897. It was "Ghost Night" and tales of the supernatural were related by James Barnes, James Jeffrey Roche, Edward W. Townsend, Paul du Chaillu, and Bangs, while William Webster Ellsworth appeared as the Attorney for the Ghost of Frank Stockton. The astral bodies of C. D. Warner, Kipling, and Mark Twain, as drawn on magic-lantern slides, added entertainment of an illustrative order. The tickets at the door were received by a hall boy dressed as a skeleton, and Bridges remembers a messenger fleeing down the steps screaming when the skeleton opened the door.

There was another entertainment at the Aldine which sounds gay enough. Invitations had been sent out announcing that "On Monday evening, April 27, 1896, at one bell, the Club will muster on deck, and be regaled with stories of the sea from the lips of sea-faring men — admirals, captains, lieutenants, Yankee skippers and others. It is expected that a few literary landsmen will be heard from. Plum-duff and grog at six bells." "The plum-duff and grog," says William Webster Ellsworth, "were translated into sandwiches and beer, but the seamen and the literary landsmen were realities. Admirals Meade and Erben were

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

among them, and there were good stories told by other naval men, while Mr. Wadsworth Longfellow, a nephew of the poet, came from Boston to tell Yankee skipper stories with most marvellous effect. Mr. John Kendrick Bangs read an unpublished chapter from a new *House-Boat on the Styx*, and Messrs. Julian Hawthorne and F. Hopkinson Smith were among other literary landsmen who spun yarns."

But of club-nights in the nineties probably the most notable was the Twelfth-Night Festival, January 6, 1899, at the Century Association. Joseph H. Choate was the King of Misrule, and he was accompanied by such legal and judicial wits as Charles C. Beaman and Henry E. Howland as his Court Jesters, and by Bangs as his Poet Laureate. Choate had just been appointed Ambassador to the Court of St. James's by President McKinley, and he was at the top of his condition. His speech to his loyal followers of the Century on this occasion was one of the most felicitous of many felicitous speeches made during a long life. Explaining his appointment of Bangs as his Poet Laureate, he said: "The brows of the elders among my poets are so thickly clustered with laurels that I have designated one of their youngest my poet-laureate, John Kendrick Bangs, who is to receive the stipend of one hundred dollars per year out of my royal treasury, and the best butt of Malmsey in my royal cellars." And, shortly, making reference to another young man who had recently been elected governor of New York, Choate said: "My most trusted lieutenant,

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

Teddy Roosevelt, has captured the chair of the Commonwealth. There is no man whom I love better or from whom I expect more or as much. He will make the principles which underlie the Century prevail through the length and breadth of this ancient State."

Roosevelt, who, we understand, had donned the habiliments of Watt Tyler for the Twelfth-Night Revels, appeared to be in high spirits. It is rumored that at the zenith of the revel he danced up to the throne whereon the King of Misrule was seated and dragged Choate brusquely from his chair; then mounted the throne himself, proclaiming that no one but he should be enthroned in the Sovereign State of New York. This act, typical of both Tyler and the ambitious governor, is the more readily credible when we learn from a stanza of Bangs's poem, delivered not many moments before, that

There's punch up in the dining-room,  
    there's punch all through the halls;  
There's punch down in the billiard-room —  
    the proper place for balls —  
No doubt there's punch up on the roof —  
    but, brothers dear, beware!  
A rum-punched head's a fearful thing  
    unless you punch with care.

Considering such doings among the notables of the nineties, can we wonder that Bangs in his *House-Boat* — the very architecture of which was Florentine like that of the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Century Club — could so naturally remove the immortals from their wrappings of solemnity? Was the brusque de-thronement of Choate by Roosevelt so far a cry from the action of Wellington in the *House-Boat* when he broke up Oliver Goldsmith's reading of *The Vicar of Wakefield* — to the infinite relief of his fellow-sufferers in the Stygian audience — by removing a camp-chair from under Napoleon Bonaparte?

In reviews of the *House-Boat* there were differences of opinion as to whether Bangs's humor was British or American — as though it ought to have been one or the other. The *Philadelphia Telegram* thought to speak ill of the book by saying that it might have been contributed to London *Punch*. The *Outlook* declared the book an illustration of distinctively American humor, because it relied for its effects upon breadth of treatment and an essential contradiction of ideas which was obvious from the very beginning. Howells was not sure it was so obvious: "I am not sure the English would find Mr. Bangs so droll as we do," he said. "A good deal of his humor is of the sly sort which occurs to one later, even if one is an American, and I could fancy an English critic coming to a full sense of it sometime after he had persuaded his public and its American following that there could not be an American humorist. For us — some of us — it has the true American quality; it is imaginative, even more than fantastic; and it is dry, with that

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

boomerang trick, which I have hinted at, of recurring in the mind."

But no matter what national or racial peculiarities qualify Bangs's humor — and the Hebraic influence is large in such characters as Solomon, Noah, or Shem, Ham, and Japhet, in *A House-Boat on the Styx* — there is no question but that it was enormously appreciated by the American public, and by some Britons as well, for there were many London editions of the *House-Boat*. Rudyard Kipling read the *House-Boat* during the ocean voyage which bore him from American shores to England in 1896, and he wrote Bangs of his liking for it, but regretted that such figures as Carlyle and Tennyson had been introduced into its pages. They were "too newly dead," he thought. Of the various chapters in the book Kipling expressed special preference for the one entitled "As to Saurians and Others," in which Barnum and Noah discuss the respective merits of modern and antediluvian animals for show purposes.

Bangs was fortunate in his illustrators, and never more so than in the sympathetic depiction of life among the Associated Shades by Peter Newell. Of Newell's portrait group illustrations the *New York Evening Post* said that "in humor and imagination they rank high, and of pure art also there is no mean evidence in them." "The artist has thrown himself so completely into the spirit of the au-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

thor's text," said the *Tribune*, "as to emerge with that spirit absorbed into his own and developed into a creation that he alone could have put forth. Were these pictures published in a portfolio by themselves they would still wake inextinguishable mirth."

In February 1897 *The Pursuit of the House-Boat* commenced its run in *Harper's Weekly*. Published in book-form in May, it immediately, like its predecessor, rose into the best-seller lists. It is a better book than *A House-Boat on the Styx*, but it was not so popular. It furnished some further account of the Divers Doings of the Associated Shades under the leadership of Sherlock Holmes, Esquire. The book was dedicated

To  
A. Conan Doyle, Esq.,  
with the author's sincerest regards and  
thanks for the untimely demise of his great detective  
which made these things possible.

Although Doyle had killed his famous detective in 1893, there were those who objected to the somewhat unorthodox, or orthodox, procedure when Bangs introduced Sherlock Holmes as a shade along the River Styx. A question of literary ethics was at stake, and it was intimated that Doyle might be irritated at having his creation turned to literary capital by another. Doyle, however, acknowledged Bangs's dedication with the utmost graciousness. "How very good





## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

of you," he wrote, "to inscribe your most amusing and original book to me! I begin to have hopes of immortality now that I have got onto your fly-leaf."

At the close of *A House-Boat on the Styx* the famous club-house had been invaded by the women of Hades on an afternoon when its membership had departed *en masse* down the river to witness a boxing match between Samson and Goliath. Their curiosity had led them to investigate the ship and examine the interior comforts of the club. While the ladies were thus engaged, Captain Kidd and his pirate crew came aboard, loosed the boat from her moorings, and sailed away with her into the unknown. The Captain, at the time, was quite unaware of the fact that within the ship were some of the "most precious gems in the social diadem of Hades." Over the disappearance of the House-Boat, Sir Walter Raleigh had wept, fearing for the fate of Ophelia, Queen Elizabeth, and others; but Socrates was unaffected. "They'll come back some day, my dear Raleigh," he said. "So why repine? I'll never lose my Xanthippe — permanently, that is. I know that, for I am a philosopher, and I know there is no such thing as luck."

*The Pursuit of the House-Boat* relates the epic adventures of the Associated Shades in their attempt to recapture their beloved club-house, as well as some of the difficulties undergone by Kidd and his pirates when they discovered so many strong-minded women aboard — especially

*John Kendrick Bangs*

Calpurnia Caesar, Lucretia Borgia, and Mrs. Noah. The Associated Shades chartered a vessel, the *Gehenna*, for the pursuit, and finally, under the guidance of Sherlock Holmes, rescued the pirates. The book is a satire on the “new woman,” on the rise of women’s clubs, and on the popular detective fiction of the day. “There is food for an hundred feasts of laughter in this odd conceit,” said the *Christian Work*; and other religious journals now registered thoughtful and appreciative reviews.

Of *The Pursuit of the House-Boat* the *Western Christian Advocate* said: “One needs a knowledge of all ancient and modern history to comprehend its depths of design upon human nature and the risibles — a certain quality of seriousness — in order to take the book cheerfully; that is to say, in the spirit of levity. It is read with a sort of double mind-action; not all of it is in the text, some of it is in the illustrations — those unique and special portraits of the shades, some of which are transparent, some of which are opaque and cast India-ink shadows. The little volume is not a specific preparation for class-meeting, nor does it belong to the category of books that the Rev. Nathan Bangs used to write; but it is neither bad for the liver nor for the heart. And if one learns to have less fear of the venerable names of the past, and is taught to see current facts, John Kendrick Bangs will need to have no shame on account of his grandfather. Sparkling, acute, *satirique*, witty, analytic of absurdities, *The Pursuit of the House-Boat* is an

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

achievement of that attitude of mind which the Romans knew as *ridentem dicere verum.*"

We have now interpreted Bangs down to what he termed his "Stygian Climax." The month *The Pursuit of the House-Boat* was published he reached thirty-five years of age, and may be said to have reached at the same time the apex in his achievement as a humorous writer. It was at this juncture, the year 1897, that the American reading public bought more Bangs books than in any other year, the number being approximately sixty thousand copies.

In 1896, between his two Hadean histories, Bangs had published *The Bicyclers, and Three Other Farces* and *A Rebellious Heroine*. The former is a collection of four related playlets, satirizing social fads and foibles of the moment. There are characters common to them all; Thaddeus Perkins, whom we met in *Three Weeks in Politics* as a veiled representation of Bangs himself, reappears here in three of the farces. These farces lack dramatic terseness and are better suited to the library than the stage. However, they often passed through what Henry James called "the odious process of practical dramatic production," at the hands of amateurs; and the title-farce, because of the current bicycle craze, was professionally produced by the Richard Mansfield Company as its curtain-raiser, 1896.

In *A Rebellious Heroine* Bangs displays his talents as a literary as well as a social satirist. The book is a take-off

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

on those realistic novelists who expressed fatalistic tendencies. It was born of the current discussion concerning Thomas Hardy's declaration that his character Tess had taken her fate into her own hands and that he literally had had no power over her. *A Rebellious Heroine* is the story of Stuart Harley, realist, who in practising his art, took a real heroine, Marguerite Andrews, as his subject. Miss Andrews in various ways upsets the plans by which Harley tries to trap her into romance and marriage, until finally Harley falls in love with "the creation of his own realism" and marries Miss Andrews himself. The story is a society tale set against the background of New York, Newport, and the White Mountains. It is illustrated by W. T. Smedley, perhaps the most faithful illustrator of the genteel life of the nineties. "The book abounds in brilliant paragraphs, and, by indirection, with clever bits of satirical criticism."

Of all his own books, *A Rebellious Heroine* was Bangs's favorite. Its humor was not of the popular order. Its comic spirit is too rarefied to make the broad appeal. The book is a literary treat, and it was written with considerable élan while Bangs was at sea on a return trip from Europe. Sailing from Genoa, he began the book at Gibraltar and completed it within five days before entering the port of New York. A novelette of about thirty thousand words, it appeared as a serial in *Harper's Magazine*, June and July 1896, and was published in book-form in the late autumn.

## A House-Boat on the Styx, and *Others*

In addition to *The Pursuit of the House-Boat*, Bangs published in 1897 *Paste Jewels* — seven tales of domestic woe, in which are represented successive episodes of a young couple wrestling with the servant problem. Through the stories a sequence runs because of the fact that the “jewels” are, severally, servants in the suburban home of Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus Perkins. These tales were characterized as house-keeping genre pictures, hygienical and ludicrous. They exhibited Bangs as a social student intimately acquainted with the folk-lore of the average American home.

In *Ghosts I Have Met, and Some Others*, 1898, Bangs continued in the track of his earlier volume *The Water Ghost*. Years of intercourse with the supernatural — including the shades along the Styx — had placed him on an even more familiar footing with the denizens of the spirit world. He had by now reached a state of mind approximating that of Coleridge, who, when asked by a lady if he believed in ghosts, replied: “No, madam. I have seen too many of them.”

F. C. Burnand, editor of London *Punch* since 1880, had been reading some of Bangs’s books in their London editions, and in June 1899 he wrote Bangs, inviting him to contribute to *Punch* some stories “treated at about the length of each one of your ‘Ghosts.’” He said that *Punch* was being enlarged for the inclusion of more extended comic matter. None of Bangs’s “Ghosts,” nor any other

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

of his humors, appeared in London *Punch*. It is usually cited as a signal honor in the history of American Humor that Artemus Ward and Mark Twain were “invited to put their legs under Mr. Punch’s Table.” Bangs was apparently too busy in the late nineties to slip his feet under the same mahogany.

For, in the closing year of the nineties, Bangs was still busy with the “Drawer” of *Harper’s Magazine* and the humorous matter of the *Bazar*. He had also, since July 1898, been writing the monthly department of “Literary Notes” in *Harper’s*, and was from January 1899, in addition, the conductor of *Literature, an International Gazette of Criticism*, in its American edition. In *Harper’s Bazar* were appearing the twelve literary parodies published in *The Dreamers: a Club*, 1899, as in 1898 had appeared twelve imaginary interviews collected in *Peeps at People*, 1899. The readers of *Harper’s Weekly* were being entertained by *The Enchanted Typewriter*, published in the same year, 1899, as an Hadean chronicle in further exploitation of the Styx and the contiguous province of Cimmeria. Beginning March 1899, *The Idiot at Home* was running serially in *The Woman’s Home Companion*, to be published in book-form in 1900. There were also appearing in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, 1898–99, Bangs’s stories of urban and suburban life, later collected in *The Booming of Acre Hill*, 1900. About November, 1899, Bangs

## A House-Boat on the Styx, *and Others*

published a slim volume of verse, bookish, wise, and otherwise, *Cobwebs from a Library Corner*.

*The Idiot at Home* shows Bangs at the close of the nineties discoursing upon the philosophy of private life and presenting with sympathy and without exaggeration the existence of the average American suburbanite at the turn of the century. *The Booming of Acre Hill*, illustrated by C. D. Gibson, shows Bangs as a sketcher of manners in the form of the short story. We have noted him before in the same vein in the form of the farce. Bangs is in these volumes a genial historian of American life. "We cannot deny," said the *Chicago Advance*, "that Mr. Bangs has abundant illustration for his subject, all the way from New York to Wichita, Kansas, though he does not invidiously specify any particular locality, and that he portrays faithfully certain features of the growth of his native land."

We shall make no attempt to resume or to characterize Bangs's books of the nineties. His habit of not repeating himself, as Howells put it, or of so doing with a difference, makes it impossible to reduce him to any category of humor. His creations were, as the *Dictionary of American Biography* says, "astonishing in their variety." An undertone of philosophy and satire runs through his work, born of a comic spirit. It is a Proteus taking all shapes to advantage. The readers of Bangs's books were but in the ten and hundred thousands compared to the millions who

*John Kendrick Bangs*

presumably read him in the weeklies and the monthlies. “If I were to make a guess,” wrote John Corbin in the *Book-Buyer*, 1900, “at the main reason for the enormous popularity of his humor, I should say it is the sound sense and good feeling that tempers his wildest extravagance.”

*MAN OF LETTERS*

BANGS was in some of his less popular writings the sort of gentleman who is referred to as "a man of letters." In fact, there was in most of his books a literary element which marked them as more closely approximating the belletrism of a Christopher Morley than the wise-cracking of a Will Rogers. Sinclair Lewis thinks that Bangs was one of the first popular American humorists to flatter a wide reading public by taking for granted that it could understand and appreciate classical, literary, and historical allusions without the aid of explanatory context. The character of the scholar and the man of letters in Bangs manifested itself particularly in his conduct of "The Editor's Drawer" and the "Literary Notes" of *Harper's Magazine*, and in his editorship of the American edition of *Literature*.

The "Drawer" was the most distinguished department of humor in any magazine of the English-speaking world in the nineties, and Bangs was its presiding genius. Among

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

the contributors of society verse, homely lyrics, and other metrical *trivia*, were most of the leading light-versifiers of the day. Among them were Clinton Scollard, F. D. Sherman, E. S. Martin, James Jeffrey Roche, R. K. Munkittrick, Joel Benton, Charles Henry Webb, Robert Bridges, James Whitcomb Riley, Oliver Herford, Guy Wetmore Carryl, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Bangs contributed copiously under his own name and that of Carlyle Smith or Gaston V. Drake. Oliver Herford customarily illustrated his own verses, and the poetical fables of Guy Carryl were usually set in picture by Peter Newell, who also contributed much himself by way of verse and illustration.

Aside from its plenty of verse, the "Drawer" contained a wide variety of shorter prose humors from various hands. H. G. Paine, Bunner's associate on *Puck*, contributed with some regularity, as did T. L. Masson of *Life*. Also there were Charles Battell Loomis, James Barnes, and Hayden Carruth. Carruth, who succeeded Bangs in the conduct of the "Drawer" in 1900, was represented in this field almost as frequently as was Bangs himself. James M. Barrie, in the earlier nineties, twice contributed whimsical prose — what he called "short papers" — "Who Picked Sylvia's Pocket?" 1891, and "For Parents Only," 1892.

But the most significant contributions to the "Drawer," those which were particularly notable from the literary point of view, were the sketches, stories, and farces, with which the department opened each month. These were,

### *Man of Letters*

after a manner, a final literary fulfillment of the original intention of the department, an evolutionary development quite in accord with its traditional character. They were, in effect, largely anecdotal situations, which, being more fully and artistically handled, allowed for greater character interpretation and projection. When Charles Dudley Warner ceased contributing his familiar essaylets to the "Drawer" and withdrew to the "Editor's Study" in succession to Howells, April 1892, Thomas Nelson Page began providing introductory matter of the new type.

Page for two years held the honorary title of Conductor of "The Editor's Drawer." During this time he contributed each month an opening sketch, generally in the Negro dialect field. His sketches were mostly brief narrations of Southern incident and character, emphasizing the element of comedy rather than pathos. They are admirable examples of what came to be known as stories of the "Harper Drawer" type. They were published in book-form as *Pastime Stories*, 1894. When Page's regular monthly contributions ceased in March 1894, the providers of introductory matter became various. Outside of Page himself — who continued to contribute irregularly — there were offerings from Ruth McEnery Stuart, F. Hopkinson Smith, Thomas A. Janvier, Laurence Hutton, Brander Matthews, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Mildred Howells, Edward W. Townsend, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Richard Harding Davis, Jesse Lynch Williams, Everett Stanton Beall, W. G. van

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Tassel Sutphen, Hayden Carruth, W. W. Jacobs, Albert Lee, and others.

Hopkinson Smith, who contributed a number of skits to the "Drawer," which were published in his book *The Other Fellow*, 1899, had a fine sense of just the thing Bangs wanted. In an interesting letter, he indicated the difficulty of obtaining it. "There is nothing more difficult to do," he wrote, "than to write a story for the 'Drawer.' I have a hundred in my head — tell them at the clubs, etc. — not one in fifty is original and hardly one with stuff enough — character stuff — to make a readable story. If the novel is soup and the short story beef-tea — the 'skit' for the 'Drawer' must be LIEBIG'S EXTRACT — everything boiled out of it but pure juice of humor, wit, character, pathos, or whatever else you are after. It is the Irishman Punch — every drop of water spoils it — so I cannot write many Drawer stories, for I cannot run up against the material. Whenever I do — if you want them — I'll send them to you." As Hopkinson Smith was one of the half dozen most popular story-tellers of the American nineties, this tribute to the quality of what was expected for the "Drawer" is significant.

As for Bangs's own introductory matter, it most frequently took the shape of satirical farces such as the four playlets published in *The Bicyclers*.<sup>1</sup> Other titles

<sup>1</sup> Bangs's farces have been variously published. Those originally contained in *The Bicyclers*, 1896, were separately published 1913 as *The Bicyclers; The Fatal Message; A Dramatic Evening; and A Proposal Under*

## *Man of Letters*

suggesting crazes of the time were "The Golfiacs" and "A Chafing-Dish Party." Bangs's contributions to the "Drawer" were characterized as being as light as thistle-down and all the more clever for their lack of forced smartness. "His wit is not simply extravagant statement, but is set in a background of reality and is a true commentary on human nature." Despite the reticences of the Bangsian realism, Theodore Dreiser admired Bangs's farces.

In dealing with the "Editor's Drawer" we have through necessity neglected the parallel department of the *Bazar*. With its fifty-two issues a year, its large page and small type, it afforded one of the most extensive outlets for short humor then existing. The *Bazar* had an enviable reputation for drollery without malice, its humors being selected for the female ear and eye, upon which organs humor of a less kindly sort would supposedly, in the nineties at least, have harshly grated. The contributors of humor to the *Bazar* were mostly those who contributed verse and short humor to the "Drawer," and toward the close of the decade the early efforts of Carolyn Wells and Joseph C. Lincoln began appearing. Gelett Burgess filled the last page of the *Bazar* for Christmas 1899 with verses and spineless homunculi called "goops."

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*Difficulties. A Proposal Under Difficulties* was also published separately in 1905. In 1913 *A Chafing-Dish Party* and *The Young Folk's Minstrels* were published, the latter being a contribution of Bangs to *Harper's Round Table*, 1897.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Such introductory sketches as characterized the "Drawer" were not within the province of the more limited department of the *Bazar*, but Bangs on occasion lifted the bann for himself, as he had done in 1892 with *Coffee and Repartee*. In 1898 and 1899 the "Imaginary Interviews" of Anne Warrington Witherup, collected in *Peeps at People*, and the literary travesties which made up *The Dreamers: a Club*, were there first published. Anne Warrington Witherup was a female reporter whom Bangs projected in order that women writers might be more conspicuously represented among the *Bazar's* humorous contributors. She not only satirized the persons interviewed — among them, Nansen the Arctic Explorer, Mr. Hall Caine of Gloomster Abbey, the Emperor William, Sir Henry Irving, Émile Zola, and Rudyard Kipling — but was herself a caricature of the inquisitorial and impertinent female journalist developed by the new intimate journalism. An irate cook in Westchester County was the first reader of the *Bazar* to penetrate Bangs's female disguise. On reading a running domestic treatise on "The Inexpert Waitress" by Miss Witherup, this cook sat herself down and wrote Miss Witherup a letter, which, after some preliminary tirades couched in most original language, ended with the sentence: "Its easy to see you aint no lady."

*The Dreamers: a Club* presents a More or Less Faithful Account of the Literary Exercises of the First Regular Meeting of an Organization made up of Thirteen Choice

### *Man of Letters*

Spirits. These gentlemen met to relate dreams which they had enjoyed after a dinner consisting of viands sacred to nightmares. The conception was based upon Stevenson's confession that the main incident to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* had occurred to him during a nightmare. "Indigestion has its uses," Stevenson had declared. "I woke up, and before I went to sleep again the incident was complete."

The dreams burlesqued the styles of well-known writers. We have here "Van Squibber's Failure," a parody of Richard Harding Davis, as related by Thomas Snobbe, Esq.; "The Overcoat," a farce after the manner of Howells, as dreamed by Bedford Parke; a Kiplingesque tale, "The Salvation of Findlayson," by Monty St. Vincent; and Billy Jones's complex contribution, "The Involvular Club; or The Return of the Screw," a piece of labor compounded of the styles of Henry James and George Meredith. There are also take-offs on James Whitcomb Riley, Hall Caine, Anthony Hope, Conan Doyle, Sundry Magazine Poets, the Spanish War Correspondents (In which Yellow Journalism Creeps In), Ian Maclaren, J. M. Barrie, and Mr. Dooley.

The illustrative work of the "Drawer" represented the best social caricature and pictorial humor of the time. McVickar, Hyde, Van Schaick, Sterner, Gibson, and A. B. Wenzell, all of *Life*, contributed much in the way of society drawing. W. T. Smedley and C. S. Reinhart also contributed in this field, as did George du Maurier of *Punch*.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

A. B. Frost, who illustrated most of the contributions of Page, Hopkinson Smith, and Mrs. Stuart, contributed original humors in plenty. Peter Newell and Oliver Herford were prolific in picture and text. Edward Penfield illustrated Bangs's farces in the poster manner, as he did also *Peeps at People* and *The Dreamers* for the *Bazar*. Caran D'Ache did occasional special work for the "Drawer." Other artists represented were E. W. Kemble, F. T. Richards, who illustrated Bangs's *Three Weeks in Politics* and *The Idiot*, H. M. Wilder, W. A. Rogers, F. S. Church, Henry Mayer, W. H. Bradley, Rose O'Neill, Everett Shinn, and Penrhyn Stanlaws. Most of these artists contributed to the humor of the *Bazar* as well, and, in addition, A. I. Keller and Gelett Burgess. As he had once contributed a joke, Frederic Remington contributed a humorous drawing, just to make the roster complete. More than two thousand drawings by these pictorial social caricaturists and humorists of the nineties, published in the "Drawer" and the *Bazar*, form a gallery in its kind never before equaled in American periodical illustration and, probably, never since surpassed.

The changes brought about by Bangs in the character of "The Editor's Drawer" continued to manifest themselves for a quarter century after he ceased control. In 1924, under new conditions in the magazine world, the department was discontinued. During these later years Bangs contributed irregularly, and among the newer con-

### *Man of Letters*

tributors who came along were Arthur Colton, O. Henry, Albert Bigelow Paine, Carolyn Wells, Burgess Johnson, Beatrice Herford, Lee Wilson Dodd, Arthur Guiterman, Dana Burnet, Clarence Day, Jr., Ellis Parker Butler, Wallace Irwin, and Franklin P. Adams.

Bangs added a minor cubit to his stature as "man of letters" by his critical reviewing in the late nineties. He entered the fraternity of reviewers by a gradual process, at first with serio-comic intent, when between January and July, 1898, he wrote a series of open letters to the *Chap-Book*. These letters were written under the assumed name of Periwinkle Podmore, and were known as "The Podmore Letters." They suffer from the character of Podmore, who professed himself a Literary Journalist who did Hackwork with Neatness and Despatch. In these letters Bangs had some fun with his contemporaries, and now and then Podmore rises to an emphasis which might entitle him to consideration as a pre-Menckenite flicker in the nineties.

Podmore dealt lightly, and sometimes severely, with such subjects as C. D. Warner's suggestions concerning an American Academy, the unfortunate increase in the practice of Authors' Readings, the need for a More Helpful Criticism, and the suggestion that Every Author be His Own Reviewer. There were also pleas for a More Scientific Form of Collaboration, a more generous development in the Art of Plagiarism; and there were some rather vigorous animadversions upon American Comic Papers. "The

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Podmore Letters " are interesting in that they give us with freshness and without restraint some Bangs-Podmore views of contemporary literary developments.

Podmore's particular *bête noire* was Hall Caine, and in his antipathy for the Manx author he certainly resembled Bangs. Bangs disliked Caine — Mr. Corridor Walking-stick of Gloomster Abbey, as he called him — and he particularly disliked the sort of pessimism for which he stood. It was Bangs's opinion that "The Pessimist, from gazing upon the lurid glare of his own soul too steadily, has made the mistake of thinking the resultant spot upon his retina is the globe we all live on and is full of yellowness"; and Podmore's dislike of Caine's *The Christian* echoes this sentiment. Podmore found *The Christian* a superficial skit and a gross libel on hospital nurses, soubrettes, the clergy and Christianity in general, and he said: "I am aware that in thus alluding to Mr. Caine's work I am taking my life in my hands; but if I thought my pen would ever be capable of calling that atrocity literature, I'd smash it and then go drown myself in a vat of red ink."

Bangs, on an occasion in 1898, with Brander Matthews presiding, appeared in a public debate with the author of *The Christian*. The subject was "The Moral Responsibility of the Novelist and the Dramatist." An eye-witness, Dr. D. Bryson Delavan of New York, writing of the event thirty-five years later, described it as a still vivid recollection. "A number of years ago," he says, "this country

### *Man of Letters*

was visited by Hall Caine who when invited to deliver a lecture before a very choice circle of ladies, announced that an incident of any kind was proper for the illustration of a literary idea. . . . His alternate in this discussion was John Kendrick Bangs, who in like manner with F. Hopkinson Smith on the occasion of his celebrated speech at the Yale Commencement Day luncheon, 1902, controverted this statement to the effect that the world was too full of good things to make necessary the interpolation of the bad. Mr. Bangs was severely criticized by the ladies present for presuming to have any opinion contrary to the views of so distinguished an individual as Hall Caine. But he was right, absolutely, and being possessed of courage as well as of good taste, did not hesitate to express himself. Mr. Bangs was a man of unusual physical beauty and of intellectual superiority. Mr. Caine was quite the opposite in looks, attire, and expression. The picture was one never to be forgotten."

Podmore had been watching — and Bangs too, we imagine — the literary reviewing in the press with some care, if not trepidation, for a number of years; and in his letter on the Need of a More Helpful Criticism Podmore declared that the number of critics helpful to beginners might be counted on the fingers of one hand of an armless soldier. He admitted that those authors who had *arrived* received many useful hints, but wisely seldom took them because it would have been bad business to change their

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

styles at a moment when fame had crowned them because of their idiosyncrasies. But he thought there were notable instances of young writing persons who might become personages if somebody capable of the task were to take them in hand. Podmore then took, among others, Richard Hard- ing Davis under consideration. What Podmore has to say about this popular author throws further side-lights upon the new personal journalism advanced by literary gossip in the field of Intimate Journalism.

“First, then,” said Podmore, “let us consider what the newspapers have told the author of *Gallegher* and *Van Bibber*. As far as I have been able to make out, the dissecting process through which the critics have gone in discussing Mr. Davis has been confined largely to a keen analysis of his personality. He has been told that he wears a yellow coat with large pearl buttons at the Horse Show, and that these have made him a feature of the exhibition. If I remember rightly, this comment was made apropos of the talented young author’s brochure on Cuba, and in further praise of the book the critic added that Mr. Davis was a tender-hearted young person who had been known to go to his club on a bitterly cold December morning to get his breakfast rather than compel his man to get up before sunrise to begin the boiling of his matutinal egg. Now this I admit makes interesting reading, and I have no doubt benefits Mr. Davis from a financial standpoint. But does it help him in his art? Does the tasteful allusion to a gar-

### *Man of Letters*

ment which is mythical help him to see the absolute banality of his book which is unfortunately real? Would a seven-column eulogy of his attitude toward his valet point out to Mr. Davis that the kind of reporting which may satisfy the difficult taste of the New York *Morning Journal* is not necessarily literature, and that a man may be good to his man and still grieve his friends with slipshod stuff which is unfortunately always published in journals of large circulation? I know Mr. Davis personally, and I may say intimately. I once helped him on with his overcoat, and he was so gracious that I should like to help him on with his literature. I should like to tell him that while spontaneousness is a splendid thing, a first draft of a story is not so magnificent. I should like to ask him if he had heard that even the Old Testament had been revised, although I confess he might retort by saying that the revision was not made by the original authors. I should like to tell him that I love him for his wholesomeness, for his manliness; that I do not object to his having a man, and rather admire him for choosing to walk in good society rather than become a latter-day newspaper Bohemian who confounds ineptitude with genius. Chiefest of all I should like to say to him that even with his enormous and well-deserved popularity he is not *there* yet, that he is merely a Klondike, that the gold within him has as yet merely manifested itself, and that unless he has a care his hour will be brief."

Although Podmore did not in his comment on Davis

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

employ the grace of diction of Henry James, his implications were not much at variance from James's more polished characterization of Davis as "one of the fresh ubiquitous young spirits who make me sometimes fear we may eat up our orange too fast."

As for Henry James himself, Podmore, in his appreciation of him, mixed with his admiration some reservations; for in his Plea for a More Scientific Collaboration he says: "If Mr. [Stephen] Crane were to walk through one of Mr. James's stories with a pot of red paint, who can deny that Mr. James's color would seem warmer, more home-like, more real? And if Mr. James, with a blue pencil, were to stalk through one of Mr. Crane's stories with his usual niceness, who can gainsay the fact that Mr. Crane's work would become English, and not essentially United States in phrasing? Indeed, if our local colorists could get away from the tints of environment, and occasionally dip their work into a pot of solid color, would there not be more literature of universal application, and less of the sewing-circle kind? And, conversely, if the sign painters who now write were occasionally to drop their primary-notions and study the art of our water colorists, would they not gain something of the quality of those men of old who wrote of human nature so convincingly that they still live, and with every passing year wax greater? I am inclined to think that a graft of these two schools would give promise

## *Man of Letters*

of a Balzac, but standing alone we shall be fortunate if they produce a Peacock."

Podmore's remarks on Collaboration strike one as being sound and suggestive. He had been observing how successfully China was being divided by the combined efforts of the nations of Europe where no nation single-handed could have hoped for success; and he was eager to help our literature by like combinations of power. He had observed how Charles Dudley Warner had become a wit since his collaboration with Mark Twain in *The Gilded Age*, and how Mark Twain had at last been recognized as a literary man. Then there were those *Tales Told in Partnership* by Brander Matthews and H. C. Bunner — which collection, according to Podmore, was known as the best book Professor Matthews ever published, particularly the portions written by Mr. Bunner. And "what a great wave of kindly feeling, prosperity, and general happiness," exclaimed Podmore, "has swept over the world since the publication of Mr. Le Gallienne's *If I Were God!* Has not the universe been better managed since the Almighty has had the advantage of Mr. Le Gallienne's views? Should not the idea of collaboration, from this very incident alone, gather unto itself renewed vigor and become once more honored in the observance?" In a postscript Podmore finally suggested that the whole idea of collaboration might, after all, better be thrown in the waste-basket, since a "combination of

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

forces invariably results in a division of royalties."

James Lane Allen's *The Choir Invisible* was the most popular book by an American author in 1897. Bangs knew Allen but slightly and always found him austere and unbending. We are not surprised, therefore, to find Podmore suggesting a combination of the talents of James Lane Allen with those of Harry Thurston Peck, the fiery editor of *The Bookman*. Podmore indicated how the classical beauty of Mr. Allen's English might soften the rugged rhetorical crags upon which the antelope of Dr. Peck's fancy disported itself; and how, on the other hand, the seething vitality of Dr. Peck might melt a little the ice which hedged about the greater part of Mr. Allen's writing. "This very juxtaposition of hilarity and polarity," said Podmore, "would work for much, and if by a judicious mixture of the two the one could soften the other, would not we who read be vastly benefited by the stream of mellow literature that would surely flow from the fountain pens of the combination? . . . Surely Mr. Allen does not wish to stand so far aloof from his fellows that none but a literary Nansen would dare brave the perils of his acquaintance, and equally sure is it that Dr. Peck would not wish to be handed down to posterity as the Yellow Kid of the American Academy."

With the absorption of the *Chap-Book* into the *Dial*, July 1898, Periwinkle Podmore passed into the inane; but as Podmore had once helped Richard Harding Davis on with

## *Man of Letters*

his overcoat, Bangs was immediately to have the opportunity of helping others on with their literature. In July 1898 he assumed the rôle of literary critic and began his monthly contribution of "Literary Notes" to *Harper's Magazine*.

The "Literary Notes" called for about four thousand words of criticism a month. These Bangs supplied for a year and a half, through December 1899. Laurence Hutton, who had written the "Literary Notes" since 1886, had set a high standard of appreciation and helpfulness as a reviewer, and Bangs continued the policy. He may be said to have emulated the dictum of the young William Lyon Phelps, who, as early as 1897, had declared that "Even a reviewer should be charitable." There was nothing of the style or manner of Periwinkle Podmore in Bangs's "Literary Notes," though they were not without some play of sanative humor. Bangs's critical commentary is modest, sparkling, and readable in a pleasant sort of fashion. Whatever limitations he, or Hutton before him, set upon the choice of books for review, was determined by a practical recognition of the sort of audience to which *Harper's Magazine* at that time appealed. The cultured class of the country was then, on the whole, what is now called "genteel," and the Harper reviewer had the courtesy to maintain a spirit of gentility, and to review books which it was thought would most appeal to that audience. Frequent expressions of gratitude which Bangs received

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

from those whose books he reviewed in *Harper's*, and elsewhere, furnish the best testimony to the quality of his achievement. To list such expressions would be to rehearse most of the names of the literary nineties. As Finley Peter Dunne, the humorist who succeeded Bangs as popular favorite at the turn of the century, said of Bangs: "His gracious appreciation of other writers was not the least of his fine characteristics."

Bangs was also in the late nineties a special reviewer and contributor of light essays on literary subjects to the *New York Times Saturday Review*, which had begun publication in 1896, and occasionally he did book-reviewing for the *Book-Buyer* and the annual Book Number of *Life*. But his main interest centered in such developments in critical journalism as were making themselves manifest at Harpers. He was especially interested in the new periodical *Literature, an International Weekly Gazette of Literary Criticism, Comment, and Chronicle*.

This periodical had first been issued in October 1897 under the auspices of the *London Times*, and it was imported for American circulation by Harper & Brothers. The editor of *Literature* was H. D. Traill, and upon its staff were such critics as Andrew Lang, Edmund Gosse, and Sir Edwin Arnold. Barrett Wendell contributed for a time an article each week on current American literature. In the course of 1898 the staff of *Literature* was augmented by the addition of two American critics, Howells and Henry

### *Man of Letters*

James. Howells contributed papers on current literary thought and criticism from New York, and James devoted himself to contemporary literature as viewed by an American living in London. Finally, with the issue of January 10, 1899, Harper & Brothers issued *Literature* from its own presses as a distinctively American product, reserving the right, however, to use such material as it chose from advance sheets of the English periodical. Bangs was put in charge of the venture.

Although the American edition of *Literature* used its privilege of taking matter from the English edition, and this extensively, it was mostly made up of original contributions, and it stands as an early and frustrated attempt to do in this country what Henry S. Canby and his associates successfully accomplished with the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1924, twenty-five years later. The quality of *Literature* during its brief life under Bangs, January 10 to November 24, 1899, may best be judged by its staff and its contributors. Traill, Lang, Gosse, and Edwin Arnold, remained on the staff as British representatives. Among Americans, were Howells, who contributed papers to all the issues, Henry A. Beers and William Lyon Phelps of Yale, and A. C. Garrett of Harvard. In the field of history it had such critics as Goldwin Smith, and Henry M. Baird of Columbia; and Nicholas Murray Butler dealt with philosophy and economics. Other contributors were Henry Mills Alden, William Sharp, M. A. Dewolfe Howe, William

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Archer, Arthur Machen, Austin Dobson, George Gissing, Justin McCarthy, Frank R. Stockton, William Butler Yeats, A. C. Benson, Edward Dowden, Richard Le Gallienne, Alfred Austin, Arthur Symons, and A. C. Swinburne.

The sudden failure of Harper & Brothers, which astounded the publishing world November 28, 1899, put an end to the American edition of *Literature*. *Literature* had been a luxury — born before its time — and in the debacle it became financially necessary to discontinue it. The London edition continued for two more years, by which time the proprietors of the London *Times* gave it up as a bad proposition, and began printing the now famous “Literary Supplement” instead.

Despite its short span and its small subscription list, the Harper edition of *Literature* was not without its influence in American literary developments. We shall cite only two cases as exemplary: one in connection with the leading realistic novel of the moment, Frank Norris’s *McTeague*; and the other in connection with the leading historical romance of the moment, Winston Churchill’s *Richard Carvel*. Writing to Howells, Norris said: “Need I say how pleased and delighted I am over your review of *McTeague* in this last number of *Literature*. It has encouraged me more than anything that has ever been said of my work.” Writing Bangs, Churchill said: “I had suspected that it was you to whom I am indebted for that article in *Litera-*

## *Man of Letters*

*ture.* Needless to say that I feel very grateful. The effect of such praise has been most stimulating. . . .”

The career of *Literature* was not without humors of its own — of a quiet sort — especially in the “Casual Comment” columns by Bangs. There was also a bit of playfulness from Mark Twain. Twain, who in 1899 was rustinating in Vienna after his world lecture tour, was much interested in *Literature*. He had some correspondence with Bangs regarding some reviewing he was to do for it, and the first book sent him for that purpose was Walter Besant’s *The Pen and the Book*. Mark Twain tried to review the book, but gave it up. “Besant is a friend of mine,” he wrote, “and there was no way of doing a review that wouldn’t cut into his feelings and wound his enthusiastic pride in his insane performance. . . . The book is not reviewable by any but a sworn enemy of his; for so far as I can see, there isn’t a rational page in it. Why, a person might as well undertake to review a lunatic asylum.”

Twain asked Bangs if he wanted an article on Copyright. “I have one,” he said, “and there is some sense in it — a quality which I do not remember to have seen intruded into the subject before. This may be a bad feature — still it gives the thing a kind of rude freshness that ought to be able to claim value. In *Literature* . . . I see that Mr. Birrell has been flatulenting quite gaily on Perpetual Copyright. Well, that is what I am pooping about myself, in the mentioned article.” Mark Twain sent a section

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

of the article to Bangs. It was called “The Great Republic’s Peanut Stand.” The rest of the article was to deal with “a scheme which would abolish the bookseller and put the whole business in the hands of the publisher.” Then, in a postscript, Twain wrote: “Please suppress ‘The Great Republic’s Peanut Stand’ till you hear from me again. . . . The brief chapter which I have kept back is the nuts of the whole thing — without it the article is a eunuch. But I must get some lacking statistics and make those testicles perfectly sound before I print; and this may take me two or three months. I want the nuts to follow immediately after the preceding chapters, with no more than a weeks interval between — otherwise they must greatly lose in value.”

*Literature* perished before Mark Twain got around to sending the nuts from Vienna, and “The Great Republic’s Peanut Stand” seems to have been suppressed forever. But *Literature* was not without its contribution from Mark Twain. Bangs had in a February issue revived the discussion of an American Academy of Arts and Letters, the founding of which had been suggested by C. D. Warner in 1897. In his “Casual Comment” Bangs asked the question: What ten of our many authors do the readers of *Literature* consider to be most worthy to become charter members of the American Academy? The ballots cast by the readers of *Literature* were few but select, and the final vote showed the following ten authors in order of precedence:

### *Man of Letters*

Howells, John Fiske, Mark Twain, Aldrich, Stockton, Henry James, Weir Mitchell, Bret Harte, John Burroughs, and E. C. Stedman. Mark Twain, who was amusedly watching the voting from distant Vienna, and who was for a time running neck and neck with Howells for first place, wrote the following appeal, dated Vienna April 27, which Bangs published:

To the Editor of *Literature*:

Dear Sir:

Do you think you could persuade Mr. Howells to come out of that polling-booth and let me keep game a while?

Supplicatingly  
Mark Twain

That Howells and Twain were among the seven original members of the American Academy, chosen in 1904, gives a modicum of historical value to this little episode preceding by five years the founding of the august institution of "American Immortals."

The failure of Harper & Brothers in November 1899 came as a shock to the whole publishing world. To the mind of the most eminent in finance as in literature, the failure had the significance of a national disaster. Relatively small as was Bangs's misfortune in the general calamity, it struck a severe blow at his literary career and cut short developments in his life of great promise. His directive positions at Harpers had brought him into promi-

*John Kendrick Bangs*

inent notice in American Letters; but the exigencies of the situation now required that he relinquish his former various editorial positions of a literary nature in order to concentrate his attention upon *Harper's Weekly*. In editing that journal, politics and matters of general public interest were to become his central concern.

*EDITOR OF*  
**HARPER'S WEEKLY**

**H**E FAILURE of the House of Harper which necessitated its reorganization in 1900 was largely the result of its being a family business. Five sons of the original Harper brothers had entered the firm in 1869 and eleven grandsons subsequently fastened themselves upon the institution. It was the policy of the Harper family to pay their progeny good salaries and leave them to their own devices. Some of them devoted their minds to buying ink or paper or mucilage at salaries running into five figures, and some of them, apparently, called once a month to receive "the blessings of the firm in timely cheques." It was impossible, said James L. Ford, for J. Henry Harper, the one dominant spirit in the management of the business, "to tell his great uncle to 'step lively' uptown with those electrotypes, or maintain tribal authority and discipline in the office." The business became impaired. Finally it was

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

decided to turn over the property to Colonel George Harvey for readjustment. This was done with the approval of John Pierpont Morgan, who had a large mortgage on the property and who was ready to make it even larger with such an enterprising journalist and manager as Harvey in control.

One of the first things Harvey did was to appoint Bangs editor of *Harper's Weekly*, at the close of November 1899. The *Weekly* had been headless for a time. Bangs had contributed editorials to the *Weekly* and had frequently consulted with W. A. Rogers regarding its cartoons. As Rogers said of Bangs in his *A World Worth While*, 1922, when speaking of young writers of the eighties and nineties: " Bangs, more than all the others, kept closely in touch with current events; and as my work as a cartoonist carried me into similar fields we were often closely associated. In all political movements Bangs was to be found exercising an independent judgment, taking sides as conscience or reason demanded. . . . He was never a compromiser or a trimmer. I was associated with him in more than one campaign and always felt a sense of security when I had him to stand with me or to back me up."

When Bangs assumed the editorship of *Harper's Weekly* there was much surprise in certain quarters. It was wondered at that a " funny-man " — a strange limitation put by some people upon the term " humorist " — should occupy a chair formerly decorated with the dignity of George



A STUDY IN HATS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY:  
BANGS, J. HENRY HARPER, AND DAVID A. MUNRO  
OF THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW



## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

William Curtis and the self-righteousness of Carl Schurz. There was fear expressed lest the noble "Journal of Civilization" become a comic weekly. So Bangs again discovered, as he had when he ran for mayor of Yonkers, that because he had tossed off humorous volumes for the delectation of the American public he was not supposed to be serious. Regarding the astonishment created by Bangs's appointment, the *Boston Herald* declared: "No doubt he will achieve as marked a success in the editorial chair as if he were a solemn prig who never smiled himself or caused others to smile."

By March 1900, the *Book-Buyer* noted that "the selection of Mr. John Kendrick Bangs as editor of *Harper's Weekly* is amply justified by the increased variety and excellence of the contents of the paper. Mr. Bangs may sometimes find himself in the predicament of Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, who occasionally writes a serious story but cannot get the public so to understand it. But Mr. Bangs's humor will be understood to irradiate his paper without impairing either its gravity or its influence." And the *New York Journalist* said: "Of all improvements made among the Franklin Square periodicals, the *Weekly* shows the greatest. No one may longer doubt John Kendrick Bangs's ability to run and edit a serious paper, and do it to the full satisfaction of the most fastidious. . . . *Harper's Weekly* leads today as certainly as it did a quarter of a century ago."

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

Neither Curtis nor Schurz had managed *Harper's Weekly*; they had merely editorialized for it. Bangs both managed it and editorialized for it: that is, he took complete charge of the periodical, conducting its editorial page, conferring on its cartoons, and arranging for its more general contents; and he gave practically all his time to it. Needless to say, there were certain advantages in such unity of control.

The new destiny of America with its lately acquired Colonial Possessions, the British War in South Africa, the Boxer Rebellion in China, the McKinley-Bryan Campaign of 1900, the Tammany Control of New York under Mayor Croker, Secretary Hay's maintenance of the Integrity of China against the predatory powers of Europe, were some of the subjects of current interest which at this time engaged the attention of the *Weekly*. Typical of the subjects treated by leading journalists and statesmen were the Isthmian Canal Projects by Henry Loomis Nelson; the Republican and Democratic National Conventions by Edward W. Townsend; American political affairs by Senators Chauncey Depew and Henry Cabot Lodge; the Cuban Situation by Bangs; Transatlantic Topics and British Affairs by Sydney Brooks, Arnold White, and A. Maurice Low; South Africa and conditions in the Transvaal by William Dinwiddie and Rudyard Kipling; the Boxer Rebellion in China by Oscar King Davis; Manchurian and Chinese Questions by John Barrett; the American Com-

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

mercial Invasion of the World by Ray Stannard Baker; Tenement House Conditions by Jacob A. Riis; the cost of Tammany Hall in Flesh and Blood by Franklin Matthews; Panic Days in Wall Street, and the World of Finance in general, by Edwin LeFevre.

Photographic journalism had not reached a position in which newspapers could compete with a weekly journal such as *Harper's* in the pictorial field. The *Weekly* was lavish in its photographic presentation of important events. The issues devoted to the death of Queen Victoria, the accession of Edward VII, the assassination of McKinley, and the ascendancy of Roosevelt, were particularly noteworthy. Leading illustrators contributed drawings. Social life was portrayed in the work of A. I. Keller, Albert Sterner, Henry Hutt, and A. B. Wenzell. There was highly artistic work in color by Maxfield Parrish and Everett Shinn. The visiting British colorist William Nicholson was commissioned to do portrait studies of Roosevelt, Bryan, and other notables. W. A. Rogers was the leading cartoonist. "Bangs in the editorial columns and Rogers in the cartoon pages made a good team," says Frank Luther Mott. Remington furnished drawings of Western life. Gordon Grant contributed vivid sketches of the war in South Africa. An energetic drawing of the United States Infantry entering Peking was sketched by Remington from a photograph sent from China by Oscar King Davis. A. B. Frost's large double-page pictures of the huntsman's world added to the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

variety. The educational world was reflected in portraits of Nicholas Murray Butler and Woodrow Wilson, who were in these years elevated to the presidencies of Columbia and Princeton, as had been Arthur Hadley at Yale, 1899, the first non-sectarian president of that backward institution. It is interesting to note, in connection with educational matter, an article by the young John Corbin, "Shall Our Universities be Divided into Colleges?" Here is projected the idea which a quarter of a century later was to find realization in the policies of Harvard and Yale.

*Harper's Weekly* was accustomed to publish a limited amount of fiction. In this sphere during Bangs's control it published romances by the popular British novelists Marriott Watson and S. R. Crockett, and *Cardigan* by Robert W. Chambers. A novel of contemporary American life, illustrated by Smedley, was Brander Matthews's *The Action and the Word*, and from the foreign field came Émile Zola's *Labor*. Contemporaneous with the issue of his first book, *The Son of the Wolf*, 1900, Jack London contributed a sketch on "Husky — The Wolf Dog of the North." There was a two-part story of the sea, "The Mutiny," by a master of that element, Morgan Robertson. The Christmas issues of 1900, 1901, and 1902, published some sketches by Theodore Dreiser. Because of Dreiser's later eminence, we quote here what he says of these three contributions to the *Weekly*: "Originally, 'Whence the Song,' 1900, was sold to *Harper's Magazine*, and then, for some reason, trans-

### *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

fferred to *Harper's Weekly*, but 'The Color of Life,' 1901, was submitted, if I recall correctly, to *Harper's Weekly*, and Bangs sent for me, praised it, and said that he wanted other material from me if he could get it. I did one thing more, 'Christmas in the Tenements,' 1902, but after that my general state was such that I really could not attempt the kind of work that would have been acceptable to him." Dreiser says that Bangs personally was always cordial and appreciative of everything he did, and he increased the wealth of Bangs's presentation shelves with a first edition of *Sister Carrie*, with the modest inscription:

To John Kendrick Bangs  
who is under no obligation  
to read the following pages.

Theodore Dreiser

Edward S. Martin wrote regularly for the *Weekly*. He carried over from the nineties his weekly page "This Busy World," in which, as in his editorials for *Life*, he exhibited his abilities as the supreme paragraphic talent of the period. There were occasional poems from Kipling from South Africa. James MacArthur, associate of Peck on *The Bookman*, conducted a literary column. Other literary matters were treated by Howells, George Edward Woodberry, and Joseph B. Gilder or Jeannette L. Gilder of *The Critic*.

Although Bangs had been for a decade the *Weekly's* most extensive fictional contributor, he now subordinated his

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

own humorous functions to the work of others. The humorists of the *Weekly* during his editorship were Edward W. Townsend, who contributed a "Chimmie Fadden" series, and Finley Peter Dunne, who contributed several dozen "Dooley" papers. Bangs appeared as a writer of fiction only in the Christmas issue of 1899. Since 1891 he had never failed to contribute to the Christmas *Weekly*. He had become a tradition, and the tradition was in this case maintained.

One issue of *Harper's Weekly* is a collectors' item in Twainiana. Mark Twain had returned to the United States in mid-October at the height of the McKinley-Bryan presidential campaign. He had during his world lecture tour and five years' absence from America, amassed a considerable fortune. He had paid victoriously all the just debts, and more, of his bankrupt publishing firm; and he was feeling rich and frisky. From London, before sailing for America, he had announced to the press his readiness to run for the Presidency on a Plutocratic Ticket, and he had nominated Bangs as his running mate. On arriving in the United States, he found no backers for his Plutocracy, but he did find enthusiastic receptions awaiting him. The more notable of these were banquets given him by the Lotos and the Aldine clubs.

At the Lotos dinner, November 10, Mark Twain was greeted by a large gathering of admirers, among whom the speakers were Governor-elect Odell of New York, Chauncey

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

Depew, Thomas Brackett Reed, St. Clair McKelway, Howells, and Bangs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich was also present. At the Aldine dinner, December 4, those sitting about the speakers' table with the guest of honor were Brander Matthews, John Fox, Jr., Bangs, Winston Churchill, Richard Watson Gilder, H. B. Dominick, Hamilton W. Mabie, Bishop Potter, Joseph Jefferson, Hopkinson Smith, and Augustus Thomas. Bangs, who had had considerable to do with the preparations for the Aldine dinner, dedicated the *Weekly* for December 15th to the honor of Mark Twain. The cover illustration was a portrait in color of the great humorist by William Nicholson. It had been a hurried job, done from the life at one sitting, and Nicholson, writing in despair over the *Weekly's* reproduction of it, referred to it as "poor green Clemens with his bloody table." The central double-page cartoon was by Rogers and portrayed "A Surprise Party to Mark Twain by His Characters." The cartoon depicts all of Mark Twain's familiar creations from the Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras through Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn and Colonel Sellers to Pudd'n-head Wilson and the Maid of Orleans. In addition, Howells contributed a medley under the title "The Surprise Party to Mark Twain."

*Harper's Weekly* under Bangs continued to enjoy considerable influence in national affairs. The attitude of Theodore Roosevelt, the dynamic political force of the time, is indicative of this fact. Personal letters of Roosevelt to

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Bangs, and letters of Secretary Cortelyou, show that Roosevelt watched *Harper's Weekly* and its political comments with an eagle eye. He took even its most casual quips seriously where they affected him; and he occasionally used the *Weekly* indirectly to make clear his political aims. There are a half dozen written requests at this time that Bangs visit Washington or Oyster Bay to talk over political matters.

Knowing that Roosevelt did not wish to be nominated for the Vice-Presidency, Bangs wrote an editorial for the *Weekly*, April 21, 1900, in fear lest such a probability be realized. We reprint it, in part, as an example of Bangs's editorial style and as an unlabored reflection of Rooseveltian traits as observed at the moment that the great political rough-rider was in mounting career:

A very interesting spectacle is now being presented to the public in the effort of certain politicians to force Governor Roosevelt into accepting a nomination for the Vice-Presidency. . . . That the Governor would like to be President of the United States goes without saying, but his system of advancement is radically opposed to any scheme which involves his getting there gradually. What Theodore Roosevelt does, he does with a rush, a slap, and a dash. He has all the qualities of a first-class avalanche inverted. He has a way of appearing at the foot of a hill, and before anybody realizes that he has begun to move he turns up on the top of it. That is the way he did things in Cuba; that

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

is the way he did things in Washington; that is the way he did things in the city of New York when sleeping policemen used constantly to be awakened from sweet dreams of peace at unseemly hours of the night by the dazzling glitter of the Commissioner's historic smile. When he went into the police business, where he sat was at the head of the table; when he went into the Navy Department, it was not long before the nominal head of the department found things going with a rush that reconciled him later to the appointment of his assistant to a lieutenant-colonelcy in the army; when he went to Cuba with his Rough Riders, the reposeful methods of the War Department sustained a severe shock; and when he returned to his native state, a whirlwind struck it which left him Governor. And now this man is asked to preside over the United States Senate — reputed to be a deliberative body — and meanwhile to go through a hot political campaign as the tail of the Administration's kite. When women begin to use Corliss engines to run sewing-machines, we shall begin to believe in the appropriateness of nominating a man of Governor Roosevelt's temperament for the office of Vice-President of the United States.

There was an inevitable popular demand, as well as good political reasons, that Roosevelt run for Vice-President, and on June 21, 1900, he was nominated. Returning to Oyster Bay he immediately wrote Bangs, June 23, regretting that he could not now write a projected article on the National Guard for the *Weekly*, and offering a rather naïve, if cau-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

tious, excuse. "I thank you most heartily," he said, "but it has seemed to me that it would be unwise for me to publish any signed article even in your paper. You see I would excite jealousy at once unless I did it in other papers. Now, can't you come out and lunch with me some day? There is much that I want to talk over with you."

*Harper's Weekly*, as it had fought against Bryan and Free Silver in 1896, again vigorously opposed Bryan in 1900 and as vigorously championed the McKinley-Roosevelt ticket. Roosevelt appreciated the support that *Harper's Weekly* gave the Republican Party. After his own fashion, he demonstrated the fact in a letter written from Albany, December 7, 1900:

My dear Mr. Bangs: —

I do not know that you will regard the offer which I am about to make as one which you care to accept; and if you do not, for Heaven's sake, have no hesitation in saying so! My feelings won't be hurt a bit. My only desire is to try in some way to show that I appreciate what *Harper's Weekly* has done. Hitherto Mrs. Roosevelt and I have resolutely declined to allow any picture of her or of the children to be printed. Here and there a second-hand copy more or less incorrect of a picture has been obtained, and finally Mrs. Roosevelt has come to the conclusion, as there has been such endless pressure and such continual efforts to get at the children and her with snap shots, that it would be more dignified once for all to have a picture taken and let it

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

be printed. Accordingly she has had a picture of herself taken and also of the six children. They have not yet been published, and if you care for them I will give them to you to have them first published in *Harper's Weekly*, provided you care to put them out by or very shortly after the New Year.

Sincerely yours,

Theodore Roosevelt

Needless to say, Bangs gladly accepted the offer to present the Roosevelt family portraits to the public through the pages of the *Weekly*. Incidentally, this letter of Theodore Roosevelt's affords a striking commentary upon the changes wrought in the privacies of American family life by the development of the candid camera as an agency of pictorial news. Since this original performance there have been "obtained" by the public press a considerable number of photographs of Roosevelt children, Roosevelt wives, and Roosevelt grandmothers.

But that Governor Roosevelt had been entirely pleased with the conduct of the *Weekly* during the campaign, the gift of the family portraits does not imply. As a matter of record, the Governor took lightning exception to one item — a bit of comedy which Bangs set at the end of his editorial page for October 20, 1900. While McKinley sat in Washington, repeating his front-porch campaign of 1896, Roosevelt busied himself traveling about the West and delivering fighting speeches. Bangs, reporting upon his pere-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

grinations with such misinformation as came to his attention, allowed himself a moment of innocent sport, and wrote:

Thanks to the professional humorists, the asperities of the campaign are occasionally relieved by a jest or two. Conspicuous is the account of the meeting in the railway yard at St. Louis of Governor Roosevelt and Colonel Bryan, their cars by chance having come to a standstill side by side. After an informal greeting this colloquy is alleged to have occurred:

“ Well, Governor,” said Mr. Bryan, “ how is your voice? ”

“ It’s as rough as the Populist platform,” replied the Governor. “ How is yours, Colonel? ”

“ Mine is as broken as Republican promises,” was the rejoinder of Mr. Bryan, and the cars moved on amid the wild cheers of the populace.

By which it will be seen that Mr. Bryan had very much the best of it, not only in having the last word in the encounter, but in the unimpaired condition of his vocal powers as well.

Though a close scrutiny of this indifferent jest will reveal the fact that it was complimentary to the Republican Party, there was unfortunately imputed a victory for Bryan in the exchange of wit. This may have disturbed the *amour propre* of Theodore. At any rate, he had no sooner read the alleged colloquy than he telegraphed from Washington, October 20:

*Editor of Harper's Weekly*

John Kendrick Bangs

Harper's Weekly, New York

For heaven's sake in your next issue correct statement that Bryan and I joked together. Whole statement is absolutely false. We neither shook hands nor exchanged a single word. We simply touched hats as the trains passed. I am incapable of jesting as reported. I think the report must have been sent out by some Bryanite to give impression of insincerity.

Theodore Roosevelt

Roosevelt's telegram exposes him as a statesman who is wisely wary lest he jeopardize his career by joining the fraternity of humorists — a fairly certain form of political suicide. President Garfield once confessed to Chauncey Depew that he himself was naturally a humorist, but that he had smothered the low coarse impulse to be amusing in order that he might further his political ambitions. Whatever Roosevelt's attitude toward humor may have been, he wisely played safe as far as the public was concerned and seldom failed to give a convincing impression of the most intense earnestness. In private he was quite capable of jesting as reported.

Shortly after his inauguration as Vice-President, Roosevelt wrote Bangs from Oyster Bay, March 25, 1901: "It was a great pleasure to see you last night. Would it be possible for you to come out here sometime and spend the night with us? There is a good deal in connection with the larger

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

political questions of the day that I should like to go over with you." Bangs went to Oyster Bay and found Roosevelt in a very subdued state; in fact, just a little humorously sheepish. Roosevelt felt that his political career was over, that he could henceforth play but a subordinate rôle. "I was the bad boy," he said, "and they stood me in the corner." Sometime later, when Bangs asked him how he enjoyed his duty of presiding over the Senate, Roosevelt replied: "I feel like a scientist looking through a microscope at a lot of bugs!"

After the death of McKinley, Roosevelt continued his interest in the *Weekly*. McKinley died on September 14, and the *Weekly* for September 21 contained two articles by Bangs, an editorial on the Office of President and a personal appreciation of Theodore Roosevelt. By special delivery from Washington came:

E X E C U T I V E M A N S I O N

Washington

September 23, 1901

My dear Mr. Bangs:

The President asks me to tell you that he liked the two articles in *Harper's Weekly*.

He hopes that in the not distant future you can come here. He would like to talk over certain matters with you.

Very truly yours,  
Geo. B. Cortelyou  
Secretary to the President

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

On a visit to the White House about this time, Bangs found Roosevelt much less subdued as President than he had been in his former nondescript position. He exhibited his talents as a stilt-walker up and down the White House corridor; and at breakfast — he and his lively daughter Alice being present — he spoke with great fervor of his eagerness to ride a high-spirited horse which he had lately acquired and which had not yet been broken to the saddle. “Why, Father,” interposed Alice, “you know that I have ridden that horse almost every morning this week.”

Bangs in the editorial columns of the *Weekly* showed continuous sympathy with the expanding sphere of the United States in world affairs. When Carl Schurz, former editor of the *Weekly*, fulminated in a ten-column philippic against what he pleased to term our *Perfidious Imperialism*, Bangs analyzed at some length the career of Schurz and found that he had been in a continual state of fermentation ever since discontent with his own fatherland had given the United States the distinction of his citizenship. Bangs found him a valuable asset to American life as a perpetual party of opposition. But to Bangs, the question of Imperialism had become a matter of merely academic importance. As Senator Depew said, in discussing Our Colonial Policy for the *Weekly*: “Porto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines became ours by conquest and treaty. We hold and must govern them under the provisions of the Constitution.”

*Harper's Weekly* for February 9, 1901, announced that

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

Bangs had gone to Cuba to look about and write of the things he saw there. This announcement was followed by a long editorial on the Philippine Problem in reference to two articles appearing in the *Weekly* for that date. Bangs, before going to Cuba, had written a defense of the American policy in the Philippines in reply to Mark Twain's drastic diatribe which had appeared in the current issue of Harvey's *North American Review*. Mark Twain's attack on the American policy was reprinted in the *Weekly* opposite Bangs's defense, both under the caption "Is the Philippine Policy of the Administration Just?" The editorial referring to these articles was written by George Harvey. He said that the opinions on the subject among Americans "are most accurately personified in the two foremost humorists of America — Mark Twain and John Kendrick Bangs. Here are two men of the highest order of intelligence and patriotism, honest in their minds, and intensely earnest in whatever they think or do outside of their fun-making books, giving utterance to opinions so wholly divergent as to make common ground seem almost unattainable. . . . Too much stress is laid by the one, in our judgment, upon acts that cannot be recalled, and too little attention is paid by the other to the practical necessities of the case."

It was Mark Twain who was alleged to pay too little attention to the practical necessities, and Bangs who was said to put too much stress on acts beyond recall. Mark Twain was not one to be impressed by the Kipling idea of taking up the

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

White Man's Burden. He suspected that "extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole." Commodore Dewey, he thought, would better have sailed away after the Battle of Manila and left the Filipinos to their own devices. Bangs, on the other hand, did not think that the Philippines should be left to the control of the Aguinaldan oligarchy with the almost certain result of rapine and bloodshed. With the Administration and with Roosevelt—with whom he had talked the matter over—he felt that the most important matter was to establish the supremacy of the American flag in the islands and enforce a peace by putting down armed factions. As to our flag in the Philippines, Mark Twain suggested that we wipe out the stars, paint the white stripes black, and add the piratical insignia of a skull and cross-bones. Bangs's attitude toward the flag was that we should live up to what it stood for, maintain its integrity, and fulfill our obligations under it by rehabilitating the Philippines until the Filipino was capable of ruling himself. Bangs's attitude toward the Philippine Problem may be taken as a foretaste of his attitude toward the Cuban Situation.

Not long after his arrival in Havana, Bangs's papers on "The Cuban Situation" began their appearance in the *Weekly*. His observations convinced him that no group of men could have done more toward putting Cuba on its feet than General Wood and his associates. The alleged discon-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

tent of Cubans with American rule, he asserted, grew out of conditions in the United States and was of the imported variety, instigated by certain American interests which had unsuccessfully tried to dominate the governor-general and had received scant consideration at his hands.

For his vigorous exposition of the state of affairs in Cuba, Bangs received cordial letters of gratitude from the Chief Officers of the American Army of Occupation, Leonard Wood, Hugh L. Scott, W. M. Black, E. St. John Greble, Frank McCoy, and William C. Gorgas. A continuous flow of letters from General Wood indicate deep appreciation of these reports on the work of the Army of Occupation. After the last of ten articles, Wood wrote Bangs: "We can never forget all that you did for us down here in telling the truth about Havana and Cuba." During Bangs's visit, Wood took him on a crocodile hunt into the Zapata Swamp on his yacht the *Kanawha*, and later sent him as a memento the leatheren hide of the largest beast shot on the occasion. This trip into the swamp was turned to political advantages in connection with the Platt Amendment, as recorded in Hermann Hagedorn's biography of General Wood.

Harvey had sent Bangs to Cuba in the expectancy that he would find fault with the Wood regime, and he had been disappointed when Bangs championed Wood's cause. Harvey had remonstrated, but Bangs's brains were not for sale at the cost of his convictions. "Our ideas conflicted,"

## *Editor of Harper's Weekly*

said Bangs; "he was the stronger man, and I went to the wall."

Harvey was primarily a journalist, and a journalist with political talents of so high an order that he naturally desired an opportunity to exercise them. His *North American Review* did not afford him the opportunity he desired. Having successfully reorganized the House of Harper, he was now ready to assert a more active rôle in the editorial field. Bangs said: "During my absence in Cuba my chief had himself come under the baleful fascination of editing the *Weekly*, and upon my return to my desk I found an 'intellectual revival' going on in my sanctum." There followed a "wobbling compromise"; and after writing, as his last stint, the obsequies for the memorial number to McKinley, September 28, 1901, Bangs stepped out. The date of Bangs's stepping out of the editorship of *Harper's Weekly* approximates that of his return from Washington, where he had attended the services for McKinley and enjoyed an interview with Roosevelt. Colonel Harvey did not favor Bangs's relationship with Roosevelt. Bangs asked Harvey what he thought he should do about it. "If I were *you*," said Harvey, "I'd tell *me* to go to Hell, and get fired." Bangs told the Colonel to go to Hell.

*FIVE YEARS OF CONFUSION:**1902-1907*

GEORGE HARVEY signalized his assumption of the editorship of *Harper's Weekly* with the issue of December 7, 1901, by placing his name conspicuously forward as editor and by subordinating the names of other contributors. A list of contributors were bunched together each week, but few of their articles were signed. The various departments of the *Weekly* were carried on anonymously, and the editorial page was extended in scope. Harvey built up a brilliant editorial section to which he was himself a major contributor. Bangs, with Harvey as editor, continued his connection with the *Weekly* in an indeterminate capacity through 1902. He contributed with some regularity to Harvey's editorial pages, he had a good deal to do with the *Weekly's* make-up, and he wrote its dramatic criticism. Under the name of "The Observer" he had begun this criticism in September, and he continued to write

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

the dramatic page, anonymously, through June 1902, and sporadically thereafter in the autumn. Although Bangs had always been an inveterate playgoer, this marks the beginning of his professional interest in the stage.

Bangs had done little writing of a literary sort during his editorship of the *Weekly*. Two books, published for the Christmas season of 1901, *Over the Plum-Pudding* by Harper & Brothers and *Mr. Munchausen* by Noyes, Platt & Company, Boston, were largely made up of material which had been contributed to *Harper's Young People* or *Round Table* in the nineties. A good many of the tall-tales in *Mr. Munchausen* were revisions of tales told in 1894 by Uncle Periwinkle in "The Periwinkle Papers" to delight the readers of the *Young People*. *Mr. Munchausen* was issued with much dignity of title-page and splendor of illustration. The Newell drawings, reproduced in eight colors by lithography, were esteemed by Newell himself the most artistic of his creations.

Upon the assassination of President McKinley, General Wood had visited Washington to talk over Cuban affairs with President Roosevelt. On returning to Cuba, he wrote Bangs in connection with certain difficulties regarding import duties on Cuban sugar and tobacco which worried him greatly. "We have assumed a strong control over Cuba's conduct and foreign relations," he said, "and we are in honor bound to see to it that she is so dealt with that she can live. . . . Once knock out sugar and you have

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

half the population of the Island idle. . . . Then look out for trouble; not war, but discontent, petty disorders, failure of revenues and all their attendant ills. . . . While in Washington I had long talks with President Roosevelt and I believe he looks upon Cuba and Cuban affairs pretty much as I do." Wood's letter was dated September 27. On October 3, Secretary Cortelyou wrote Bangs with regard to a prospective book on Cuba: "The President requests me to say that he would particularly like you to write the book. He wishes also to ask if you cannot come down here soon and take lunch or dinner with him."

In May 1902 the American flag was lowered in Cuba, and the Republic of Cuba was born a free nation. In the same month appeared Bangs's *Uncle Sam Trustee*. This book, published by the Riggs Publishing Company, New York, was profusely illustrated with photographic material substantiating Bangs's testimony to the accomplishments of the American Army of Occupation. Through its timeliness, the book enjoyed widespread attention. Roosevelt wrote Bangs of his personal obligation to him, and he told him that in his opinion the book had been a prime factor in furthering confidence in the government's fulfillment of its Cuban trust. Elihu Root had put at Bangs's disposal all papers, confidential or otherwise, in the possession of the War Department, and the book had been written out of a position of advantage which few writers possessed. *Uncle Sam Trustee* was almost everywhere highly approved. The

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

*Nation* and the *Dial* condemned it. The editor of the *Dial* later wrote Bangs an apology for the ignorance of his reviewer. Said Poultney Bigelow: "I thank God for the pen of an honest man now and then in this inky slough of misrepresentation at the bottom of which kicks and sputters the poor wretch we call our Colonial Empire!" Senator Lodge wrote: "I have read your book from beginning to end. As an American I am extremely grateful to you. . . . It is a fine story, honorable in the highest degree to the United States, and most admirably told. I marvel at the skill with which you have made statistics and official reports so interesting as well as so enlightening."

During the year 1902, having no longer the singleness of aim which the editing of the *Weekly* had required, Bangs began his extensive contributions to the newspaper syndicates, which, having originated in the nineties, were now developing on the grand scale. These contributions mark in Bangs's writings a distinct change from productions literary to productions journalese. The habit of commenting on men and affairs, formed while editing the *Weekly*, is now in these newspaper writings continuously exercised. The leading Sunday Magazine feature of 1902 in the *New York Herald* was Bangs's "Who's What and Why in America," a series of one hundred and fifty brief comic biographies of celebrities of the day, each one illustrated by a cartoon caricature. Bangs contributed these biographies under the name of Wilberforce Jenkins. They were a bur-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

lesque of *Who's Who in America*, the first issue of which had appeared in 1900.

Running currently with the work of Wilberforce Jenkins in the *Herald*, a series of twenty-eight papers, "The Genial Idiot, His Views and Reviews," were contributed by Bangs to the Sunday *New York Times* from June through December. In these papers the Idiot becomes a stalking-horse through which Bangs shoots his wit at current fads, foibles, and other matter of the moment.

Bangs did not contribute much to the magazines in this year in the way of fiction or humor, although he was represented in the Humor Number of *Collier's Weekly*, October 25, and the Christmas issue of *Harper's Weekly*. In the *North American Review* for September he took part in a symposium on the subject "Will the Novel Disappear?" together with Howells, Hamlin Garland, James Lane Allen, and Hamilton W. Mabie. The year 1902 had seen the publication of four Bangs books in addition to *Uncle Sam Trustee*. They were *Olympian Nights*, an account of the adventures of a modern mortal with the immortals of Olympus, published by Harper & Brothers; and three juveniles, *Bikey the Skicycle*, published by Riggs, *Mollie and the Unwiseman*, Coates & Company, Philadelphia, and *Emblemland*, R. H. Russell, New York. These books were illustrated respectively by Albert Levering, Peter Newell, Albert Levering and Clare Victor Dwiggins, and Charles Raymond Macauley.

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

Bangs's production of 1902 would suggest that he was working overtime; and so he was. He had got himself in debt and was under high pressure. George Harvey, although he had forced Bangs from the editorship of the *Weekly*, appears to have tried to help the situation. With the financial backing of William C. Whitney, Harvey purchased the *Metropolitan Magazine* and in December 1902 appointed Bangs its editor at \$10,000 a year. In a declaration to the newspapers, Harvey announced that there had developed a field for a popular magazine whose chief mission should be to tell about New York. He said that New York had become the most wonderful city in the world, and that the country felt the keenest interest in the manifold phases of New York life. In buying the *Metropolitan* he had bought only a name, but the name exactly fitted the purpose, and he said that "the editor of the new *Metropolitan* will be Mr. John Kendrick Bangs, whose recognized literary capacity is admirably supplemented by his intimate knowledge of everything that goes to make life in New York bright and pleasing."

Bangs's editorship of the *New Metropolitan* was of brief duration, from January through June, 1903. The issues which carried out the new policy were those of April, May, June, and July, and it was these that Bangs edited. To the *New Metropolitan* Bangs contributed a monthly department, "The Editor's Note-Book," and a department of drama. Of metropolitan interest were articles on the stage,

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

the opera, and music, by David Belasco, Lawrence Gilman, and W. J. Henderson. E. W. Townsend wrote on New York's foreign colonies, Thomas A. Janvier on Bohemian life, and Hamblen Sears on sporting matters. There were contributions from Mark Twain, Howells, John Corbin, Clinton Scollard, Carolyn Wells, Julian Hawthorne, Mrs. Burton Harrison, Edwin Lefevre, Albert Bigelow Paine, Walter Prichard Eaton, Morgan Robertson, and Burgess Johnson. Howells contributed a novel called *Letters Home*, in the form of epistles written to Boston by various people in New York. Through the letters ran a story of the American metropolis. This novel was not such as to excite popular interest. Howells's genius did not lend itself to the serial art. "I wish I could help you out in dividing it," wrote Howells to Bangs. "My own simple device in my editorial days would have been to cut it into six parts, as near the same size as possible, and print one a month. If there were thrilling climaxes in it, I might do differently."

Mark Twain's contribution, "Instructions in Art," ran into two issues. It was illustrated by some crazy sketches which he had made during and after his Sixty-seventh Birthday Dinner, which was given him at the Metropolitan Club by Colonel Harvey, November 28, 1902. Under his sketch of Chauncey Depew, who had been a principal at the occasion, he wrote: "First you think it's Dante; next you think it's Emerson; then you think it's Wayne McVeagh. Yet it isn't any of them; it's the beginnings of Depew."

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

This dinner had been an intimate affair behind closed doors with about fifty guests seated about a large oval table. Harvey presided, flanked by Mark Twain on his right and John Hay on his left. At either end of the oval sat Chauncey Depew and Thomas Brackett Reed. Finance was represented by H. H. Rogers, Thomas F. Ryan, and August Belmont; journalism by Adolph S. Ochs, Horace White, St. Clair McKelway, and Samuel Bowles; the drama by Charles Frohman; art by Howard Pyle and John W. Alexander; the church by the Reverend Joe Twitchell; literature by Booth Tarkington, Henry van Dyke, Hamlin Garland, George W. Cable, Hopkinson Smith, Will Carleton, Richard Le Gallienne, Howells, Bangs, Hamilton Mabie, and others.

After the waiters had withdrawn, the entertainment began. Shrieks of laughter came from the room for two hours. As a convivial occasion this banquet far outranked the celebrated Seventieth Birthday Dinner of 1905. Those who entertained with speeches were Harvey, Reed, Depew, McKelway, Mabie, MacVeagh, and Mark Twain. Van Dyke, Howells, and Bangs delivered poems. Bangs, in his verses, had traced Mark Twain's lineage from Adam, looking for an honest man. Twain said: "Bangs has traced me all the way down. He can't find that honest man, but I will look for him in the looking-glass when I get home." Mark Twain had written on a souvenir at Bangs's plate: "It is more convenient to be rich than good." The souvenir which each guest received was an electrotype of a self-portrait of Twain,

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

under which he had scrawled: "I cannot make a good mouth, therefore leave it out. There is enough without it, anyway." It was this souvenir portrait of himself which led Twain to make other sketches — some of them of the guests at the banquet — and these furnished the illustrations for his "Instructions in Art" in the *Metropolitan*.

Why Bangs left the *Metropolitan* after trying out its new policy for four months, we do not know. It is possible that the magazine did not show signs of success such as Harvey had hoped for, and it was thought better to return it to its traditional fictional direction. It is possible also that Harvey took upon himself his right to edit the periodical from above. There are indications that Harvey arranged for contributions by Hamlin Garland over Bangs's head. It is possible that certain interests in Bangs's life led him at this time in other directions. At any rate, a current paragraph in *Vanity Fair* stated that Bangs had an ambition to be a comic-opera librettist: "Sometime ago he contracted to write the book of a comic opera in collaboration with Rod-eric C. Penfield . . . a young newspaper man who used to be Mr. Bangs's assistant on *Harper's Weekly*, and they are both at work on the book, Bangs doing the lyrics."

If Bangs left the *Metropolitan* in June 1903 to write a comic opera, a year and a half was to pass before the opera appeared; and a number of other matters pressed themselves forward in the meantime. Bangs's wife died April 5, 1903, and there were family matters to attend to. Bangs,

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

about this time, sold to Harper & Brothers for the sum of \$5,000 all the rights to his books published by them to that time, reserving to himself the privilege of buying them back at the same price at his convenience. He apparently needed a vacation; so he went abroad for the summer, taking with him his eldest son and leaving the other two hostages in Yonkers or in the White Mountains at the Profile House in care of their Aunt Anne. On returning to America in the autumn, Bangs turned to the drama as his main interest. He now found it convenient, with such nocturnal business on his hands, to take an apartment in New York for himself and Jakey, Jr., who was now attending the Cutler School in that city. Little Russ and Frankie were left to the tender care of two aunts and a grandmother in Yonkers, where they ran more wild than ever.

In May 1903 the *Illustrated Sporting News*, backed we believe by William C. Whitney, had begun a brilliant career in New York. It was a weekly journal devoted to Sport and Outdoor Life, and by the middle of October it increased the scope of its devotion to encompass the Drama, with Bangs as its dramatic critic. Bangs here, as in *Harper's Weekly*, 1901-1902, gave extended consideration to the New York stage. A reading of his dramatic reviews, gathered from the *Weekly*, the *Metropolitan*, and the *Sporting News*, furnish a fresh and vivid commentary on the state of the theatre in New York in the early years of the century.

The year 1903, on the whole, seems to have been some-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

thing of a year of rest for Bangs. Relative to his production of other years, there is little evidence of prolific writing. Outside of editing the *Metropolitan* for the first half of the year and conducting the dramatic pages of the *Sporting News* during the last three months, his only extensive product seems to have been eighteen "Genial Idiot" papers for the syndicates. He published no book of his own this year, although he wrote an introduction for a new edition of George Horatio Derby's *Phoenixiana*, published by Appleton with illustrations by E. W. Kemble.

In 1904 Bangs's activities again became varied and prolific. He continued his dramatic criticism for the *Sporting News* until April; in the early part of the year he supplied a satire of twenty-five chapters to the syndicates on Roosevelt, "Teddy in Blunderland"; from March through December he syndicated through forty-three weeks another series of "Genial Idiot" papers on current topics to the newspapers; he supplied a stream of weekly articles for a time to the *Herald*; he became general manager and editor of *Puck* in May, and wrote two or three pages for it each week; in the autumn he began the preparation of seventeen installments of a prophetic phantasy, "The Spectrophone," for the *Herald*; and in December his comic opera *Lady Teazle* was produced.

In 1905 Bangs continued his editorship of *Puck* until June; and supplied to the syndicates a good deal of matter, including sixteen installments of "Jimmieboy in Trust-

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

land," in which were recounted the adventures of the hero with the Amiable Cow (The Beef Trust), the Iron Pig (The Steel Trust), the Princess Nicotine (The Tobacco Trust), etc., furnishing a commentary broadly humorous on the days of Frenzied Finance and Secretary Garfield's investigation of the Trusts. Bangs also contributed to *Harper's Weekly* a half-dozen "Raffles Holmes" stories. These stories burlesqued the popular detective and crime fiction of the day, specifically the work of Doyle and E. W. Hornung. Raffles Holmes was a son of Sherlock Holmes and a grandson of Raffles. He inherited traits from each, and thus became an artist both in the committing of crime and in the detecting of it. These stories were published in book-form by Harper, 1906, under the title *R. Holmes & Co. Being the Remarkable Adventures of Raffles Holmes, Esq., Detective and Amateur Cracksman by Birth.*

Bangs was editor and general manager of *Puck* from May 16, 1904 to May 16, 1905, editing the issues from June to June. A copy of his contract indicates that in addition to editorial surveillance he was expected to provide a page of editorials each week, and other matter which would be the equivalent of a page and one half of print. He also contracted to supply nothing to any other periodical which might be in a class to rival *Puck*, though he reserved the right to contribute to magazines of other kinds, to newspapers, and to write for the stage; also to deliver not more than twenty lectures in distant cities. For so contracting to

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

confine himself to *Puck*, his stipend was to be \$10,000 per annum. The contract was thoroughly fulfilled for a year, but not renewed on its expiration. Bangs apparently did not like the confinement. Arthur H. Folwell, who succeeded Bangs as editor of *Puck*, said that Bangs had offered to continue with *Puck* if he could "come down three days a week at \$5,000 a year."

During Bangs's editorship of *Puck* he enjoyed the assistance of Arthur Folwell and Bert Leston Taylor, both of whom contributed to almost every issue. They had been on the staff of *Puck* when Bangs took charge. Other contributors were Thomas L. Masson, Charles Battell Loomis, Wallace Irwin, Tom P. Morgan, Victor A. Hermann, Carolyn Wells, Clinton Scollard, and W. J. Henderson. There was also a contribution from Franklin P. Adams, coincident with the time of his arrival in New York to take up columning in the *Evening Mail*. Illustrators for *Puck* were Joseph Keppler, the younger, J. S. Pugh, Grant Hamilton, E. W. Kemble, Rose O'Neill, L. M. Glackens, Frank A. Nankivell, Albert Levering, S. D. Ehrhart, and Gordon Grant.

Bangs's own contributions to *Puck* were as per contract. In addition to the editorials, he wrote much matter anonymously and under the name of Wilberforce Jenkins. Jenkins was to *Puck* what Carlyle Smith had been to *Life*. In 1904 Bangs contributed a serial satire on the contemporary stage, "Alice in Stageland"; and, in collaboration with Taylor and Folwell, he wrote a burlesque historical novel,

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

*Monsieur D'en Brochette*, published in book-form by the Puck Press, 1905. In 1905 he contributed twelve stories to *Puck*, illustrated by Levering. These were published the same year by Harper as *Mrs. Raffles. Being the Adventures of an Amateur Crackswoman*. These tales of crime satirized certain phases of lavish display and carelessness of riches by the ultra-swagger people of the hour, the scenes in the main having reference to Newport and dealing with such matters as Mrs. Gaster's Maid, Mrs. Rockerbilt's Tiara, Mrs. Innitt's Cook, Mrs. Shadd's Musicale — all in a series of remarkable plots which contained, said *The Critic*, material for detective stories that quite surpassed the plots invented for the original thief by Mr. Hornung.

Since Bangs became editor of *Puck* in the year of a presidential campaign, it became necessary to determine *Puck's* political policy. *Puck* had customarily leaned toward the Democratic Party, as had been the case with Bangs, except for the years when that party had been under the domination of Bryan. Now, with the nomination of so sound a Democrat as Judge Alton B. Parker, Bangs again favored that party, especially since Roosevelt seemed to be getting out of hand with his big stick and trust busting. But the policy of *Puck* under Bangs was independent rather than partisan. "My judgment is," wrote Bangs to the principal owner of *Puck*, "that we should preserve an entire independence of both parties, trying to be as helpful as possible to the regenerated Democracy, and holding the Republicans

*John Kendrick Bangs*

squarely and rigidly up to the standard of their own claims. . . . This will free us from the odium which attaches to the ordinary mugwump critic whose comment on public men and public questions too often suggests deep seated indigestion rather than profundity of conviction."

While editing *Puck* Bangs had been diligently collaborating with A. Baldwin Sloane and Roderic Penfield on *Lady Teazle*, an operatic version of *The School for Scandal*. Sloane had already made a reputation for his music in *The Mocking Bird* and *Sergeant Kitty*. Penfield had served as dramatic editor of the *Mail & Express* and more recently as managing editor of the *Illustrated Sporting News*. In the collaboration, Sloane wrote the music, Bangs wrote the lyrics, and Penfield, who had originally suggested the idea of adapting *The School for Scandal*, worked with Bangs on the condensation of the comedy to its operatic form. The opera had its première in Baltimore December 19, 1904, and opened in New York at the Casino Theater on Christmas Eve. It was a notable occasion, for Lillian Russell, the Great American Beauty, was to have in the rôle of Lady Teazle the best opportunity of her career to display her various talents.

Lillian Russell was very much pleased with *Lady Teazle*. She was happy to have as her vehicle an operatic libretto free of the usual heterogeneous horseplay and disconnected vaudeville. She asserted that the Bangs lines were the cleverest she had ever sung. "At last something seems worth

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

while," she said. "I feel I have never before learned a part which was worthy of real effort." It was announced that Miss Russell had selected her own chorus girls out of about five hundred of the best in the city from Ada to Zaza. Four fifths of them were brunettes, making a splendid foil and frame for the blond effulgence of the star. An interesting item in the production was the screen used in the famous screen scene. It was the property of Augustin Daly and had always been used in his productions of *The School for Scandal*. Ada Rehan, the ideal Lady Teazle of Sheridan's drama, sent it to Miss Russell for her use in the modern version.

Miss Russell had scored her first successes as comic opera queen at the Casino some fifteen years before, having gone there from Tony Pastor's to sing in Offenbach's *The Princess of Trebisond*e and other operettas. Now that she was returning to the Casino, after some years of acting experience with Weber and Fields, there was great excitement along Broadway. She was in her early forties and magnificent in the fulsome panoply of her charms. Seats for the opening were sold at auction by Dewolf Hopper, and boxes went at \$200 and seats as high as \$25. Diamond Jim Brady bought a row of fourteen at \$15 apiece, and Stanford White was among the high bidders.

Reporting on the New York première, the *World* said: "Enthusiasm gushed like a newly tapped oil well last night." "The star," said the *Herald*, "had what it is no ex-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

aggeration to call an ovation all through the evening.” “A vision of bewildering beauty,” said the *Evening Sun*, “she moved through the various scenes of Sheridan with more distinction and *savoir faire* than she has ever shown on this stage before.” Even The Playgoer in *Town Topics* was pleased with Lillian, and also with the play: “Pictorially considered she is a marvel,” he said. “She is an infinitely more beautiful woman now than she was fifteen years ago. After most of the rattle-brained, horse-play musical shows of the past two seasons *Lady Teazle* seems a treat.”

“But when all has been said and done,” said the *Illustrated News*, “it is the intelligence that characterizes the book of *Lady Teazle* that is chiefly responsible for its success.” That severe critic, James S. Metcalfe of *Life*, vouched for the fact that Sheridan had been treated with respect and good taste. “An admirable idea, this,” commented the *Sun*, “of elevating our modern musical comedy stage by lifting the plots of the classics. The work of the librettists is admirable in cleverness and in tact. The lyrics are of a very high quality . . . It is a long time since an American musical comedy has made so strong an appeal to cultivated taste.” And, of Bangs’s speech to a grateful audience at the close of the performance, the *Mirror* said: “Mr. Bangs responded to the calls with one of his characteristic impromptu speeches and gave a graceful tribute to the master his work has only honored.”

When the enthusiasm was over, James Gibbons Huneker



To John Frederick Blaugs.  
from Lillie Grayle  
Lillian Russell  
Dec 1st 1905

LILLIAN RUSSELL AS LADY TEAZLE



## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

delivered himself of the following final just judgment: "The mixture of Sloane, Bangs, and Lillian Russell in *Lady Teazle* at the Casino did not interest me very much. Sheridan was carved to make a holiday for the joint authors and, as we all know John Kendrick Bangs, the carving was neat and reached the vital spots with speed. Why repeat that Lillian was fair to the eye, that her voice wobbled and her gems sparkled? Our grandchildren will be writing of this Diana de Poitiers of the footlights. The text was better than the music, the acting was better than the text and — possibly — the royalties better than the acting. So everyone is happy. Why should the galled critic wince? "

Although the atmosphere of the eighteenth century was preserved in *Lady Teazle*, there were elements applicable to contemporary society as well. New York society might see itself reflected in such lyrics as:

We are the Smart Set,  
The *à la carte* Set;  
We have no other mission than to be  
The transcendental  
And ornamental  
Top figures of a High Society.

And it may have been for this reason that Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, at the apogee of her social triumphs, chose to have the second act of *Lady Teazle* performed in her New York residence on a temporary stage. The Fish mansion was decorated with Louis XV furnishings to suit the epoch of the



## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

The fantasy was tried out, October 9, at the Academy of Music in Baltimore. Although it received good notices, Savage had a case of tonsillitis, and because of this — and for other reasons, including a soubrette — he chose to go off on a vacation and to put the play in cold storage. Bangs, however, continued to be hopeful.

In the mean time the last of the great dinners to Mark Twain took place on December 5, 1905, at Delmonico's, in celebration of his Seventieth Birthday. Twenty-eight years before, in Boston, at the Seventieth Birthday Dinner to Whittier, Mark Twain, wittier than the occasion demanded, had blown a strong gust of Western Humor undiluted into the countenances of New England austerity, filling his friend Howells with dismay by burlesquing Emerson, Longfellow, and Holmes, in their very presence, as a bunch of drunken hoboes, finally to sit down, chagrined, in an atmosphere of frosty silence. The New England Brahmins apparently possessed as little humor wherewith to limber their dignity as Mark Twain then had tact to moderate his vulgarity.

But now things were different. New York had become the literary capital of America, and Mark Twain could do as he pleased. At the invitation of George Harvey, over one hundred American authors gathered to honor the Lion of Letters on his attainment of three score and ten, and messages flowed in from the English-speaking world with their gratulation. Mark Twain's speech on this occasion was one of the finest of his utterances, showing him the possessor of

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

an abundance of tact, of sweetness, and of light, without having lost, at the same time, one jot of the vulgar touch. Among those whom Harvey called upon to pay tribute to Mark Twain in prose or verse were Howells, Henry van Dyke, Richard Watson Gilder, Brander Matthews, Bangs, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Irving Bacheller, Andrew Carnegie, George W. Cable, Hamilton Mabie, Agnes Repplier, Rex Beach, Hopkinson Smith, and Carolyn Wells. When it came Bangs's turn to come forward to the table where Mark Twain sat and pay his tribute, he read the following appreciation:

Here's to the Prince of Wits!  
Here's to his Seventy Years!  
Time, the fugacious flits  
Over this vale of tears,  
Yet never a mark leaves in its train  
To dimmer the loyal love for Twain  
In the warp and woof of the hearts of those  
Whose sorrows and woes,  
Whose trials and pain,  
Have vanished like smoke in the thinnest air  
'Neath the magic touch of his genius rare!  
God give him power  
For every hour  
Of peace he has brought where storm-clouds lower!  
God give him a day  
For every ray  
Of light he has shed on sorrow's way!  
God give him a year

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

For every fear  
His blithesome spirit has turned to cheer,  
And his Seventy Years will straightway be  
But the end of a promising infancy! <sup>1</sup>

Mark Twain, overcome by the cumulative emotions of the evening, could not keep tears from his eyes. Leaning forward at the moment of applause which greeted the close of Bangs's tribute, he shook to airy air a tear which coursed down his nose and smilingly elucidated the lachrymosity with the remark: "That's not grief, Bangs; that's *envy!*"

In the course of the spring of 1906, *Tomorrowland* was removed from storage. With the collaboration of Vincent Bryan it was revamped. Under the name *The Man from Now*, it opened at the Tremont Theatre, Boston, on Decoration Day. It played Boston for fourteen weeks, New York for four, Chicago for three, visited Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, and ended by playing Washington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, in January 1907. By that time Bangs maintained that there was only one line of his left in it. He thus passed from the dramatic scene gradually but no less completely.

For a time Bangs had made large plans for a dramatic career. He had begun a play *The Belle of the Bowery* with Penfield. He had arranged with Harpers to make light operas out of *Trilby* and *A House-Boat on the Styx*. He

<sup>1</sup> From *The Foothills of Parnassus*. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company, Publishers.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

had written a play called *The Candidate*, dealing with a man running for mayor of a small town. He had begun a musical comedy version of Robert W. Chambers's *Iole*; and for Lillian Russell there had been completely written the book and lyrics of *Katharine*, a professional operatic version of his earlier amateur travesty of that name. Victor Herbert was quite ready to do the music for this piece, and spoke enthusiastically about it to both Bangs and Miss Russell; but Miss Russell was under the management of the Shuberts, and Herbert would have nothing to do with them. Miss Russell was of a mind to terminate her contract with the Shuberts, whom she herself desired to be rid of — so she wrote Bangs — but she was suddenly offered thirty-six hundred dollars a week to travel a vaudeville circuit. She decided to make hay while the sun shone.

So Bangs learned that writing for the stage, as far as he was concerned, was about as satisfactory a way of supporting a family as gambling at Monte Carlo. He was not a dramatic genius, after all; nor was he an adept at constructing plays. The construction of *Lady Teazle*, as he was quite aware, had been the work of Sheridan.

Bangs had tried many things since he had told Colonel Harvey to go to Hell, and he had gone through some Hell himself. But suddenly there dawned the light of a newer day. In the autumn of 1906 he had made a lecture tour in the Far West under the management of the Slayton Lyceum Bureau of Chicago. He had received \$500 a week and all

## *Five Years of Confusion: 1902-1907*

expenses, and had been free to write as he chose. So successful had been this venture that he now determined to make his way in the world as a lecturer and free-lance writer—or “independent producer,” as he termed it. Therefore, in 1907, at the age of forty-five, Bangs retired from New York and became a citizen of Maine. The City of Greater New York had become too much for him. It was changing rapidly from the Little Manhattan wherein he had risen to apices of sorts, and he now deemed it wise to remove himself before he became “a mere cinder in the public eye.”

*RETREAT TO MAINE*

**F**OR the last fifteen years of his life Bangs was a citizen of the village of Ogunquit in York County, Maine. His cottage at the Profile House in the White Mountains, where since the late nineties his family had spent many summer months, he sold in 1906, and purchased, instead, a dozen acres of Maine coastal land. His house in Yonkers he had rented, and was soon to sell. He had rid himself of his rarer books in a three-day sale in New York, keeping for himself several thousand volumes which he valued for their contents, rather than for their bindings, their margins, or their dates. His days of bibliomania were over. He was no longer rich enough — in fact, never had been — to afford the luxuries of the collector, and he practiced the Emersonian principle of eschewing possessions that he could no longer animate or be animated by. Such possessions as he retained were transported to his new home in Maine, a dwelling staunchly constructed at an elevation above the Atlantic, a hundred yards back from its rocky shore. Now

## *Retreat to Maine*

that his sons were old enough to attend boarding-school and college, a winter home was no longer necessary; and as his lecture tours increased in scope he was accompanied on them through the winter months by his wife, Mary Blakeney Gray, whom he had married in New York, April 1904.

In Yonkers, Bangs's rear veranda had overlooked the Hudson, with the Palisades blocking off the western horizon. Now, from the front parapet of his Maine home, he could look eastward with nothing but the curve of ocean between himself and the Bay of Biscay. This new expanse became to him a valued spiritual possession. Westward, back of his house, his new land rose to a junipered and protecting hill, and then sloped to the main road, in generations past known as the King's Highway. Between the hill and the highway, a piece of rough pasture was gradually transformed by the indefatigable labors of Mrs. Bangs into a garden both floral and vegetable, and here Bangs with much healthful benefit to himself exercised on late afternoons the arts of the hoe and the rake, the hose and the lawn-mower. In the process he learned the meaning of Voltaire's adjuration to cultivate one's own garden — the earthly and the spiritual.

To dig and delve in nice clean dirt  
Can do a mortal little hurt.

To live 'mongst lush and growing things  
Is like to give the spirit wings.

*John Kendrick Bangs*

Who works 'mongst roses soon will find  
Their fragrance budding in his mind,

And minds that sprout with roses free —  
Well, that's the sort of mind for me!

So did Bangs express to himself the value of being a gardener, and although he did not travail at the task or earn any money thereby, from the soil of Maine he drew wages of sorts:

Wages best of all,  
Better far than wealth,  
Paid in good fresh air  
And a lot of health.

Let the other feller  
For the dollar scratch —  
I am quite contented  
With my garden-patch.

If in his new contacts there developed in Bangs a strain of the rural philosopher, it was because there had always been something of rural philosophy latent in his humor. Even back of the patent-leather shoes, frock-coat, and top-hat of the Idiot, there had played a rich vein of horse-sense, essentially Yankee in character, and Bangs's retreat to Maine was a coming home to the New England of his ancestors. Homely philosophy and native wit sprang here from the soil. Maine had supplied America with a goodly num-

### *Retreat to Maine*

ber of its famed succession of wits — Seba Smith before the Civil War, then Artemus Ward, and, later, Bill Nye. Thomas Brackett Reed, whose Yankee wit had been of such power when he wielded the whip over the National House of Representatives, had also been a Maine man. His last speech had been made at the Mark Twain Dinner of 1902. A week later he had died, and Mark Twain wrote of him in *Harper's Weekly*: “He wore no shell. His ways were frank and open, and the road to his large sympathies was straight and unobstructed. His was a nature which invited affection — compelled it in fact — and met it half way. Hence he was ‘Tom’ to the most of his friends, and to half of the nation.” As Tom Reed represented Maine in politics, he represented it in character, and his qualities were those which Bangs found in his people.

To Bangs’s enthusiasm for Maine, Maine to a reasonable degree responded, and soon gave him an opportunity for better acquaintance. The State Republican Party seized upon him as its leading spell-binder in the Taft-Bryan Campaign of 1908. Bangs opened the national campaign that year at Alfred, the county seat of York, and was subsequently carried through the leading communities of the state as a stump-speaker, appearing with the various state and local representatives of Republicanism, and such national figures as Senators Hale and Borah and Secretary Garfield. After this introduction to the people of his adopted state, Bangs was known as a Maine man every-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

where; and he finally identified himself with the Republican Party.

In 1912, William Gibbs McAdoo, a friend of Yonkers days, thought Bangs might be ready to serve the cause of Democracy under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson. Homer Cummings, head of the Speakers' Bureau of the Democratic National Committee, wrote Bangs that Mr. McAdoo was anxious to have him devote some time to the speaking campaign on behalf of the national ticket. Bangs wrote Cummings that if Mr. McAdoo would make a dozen speeches in favor of Taft in New York and New Jersey, he would perform a similar service for Mr. Wilson in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Bangs received from Cummings the following keen rejoinder: "Your proposition that Mr. McAdoo address Taft audiences in New York and New Jersey has received my thoughtful consideration. I fear, however, that it is not feasible. I am reliably informed that there are no such audiences. However, this is no reason why you should not speak for Mr. Wilson in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi — after the election. I, therefore, tender you the following assignments: November 6th, Cold Water, Alabama, or, if you prefer, Zero, Mississippi. You could wind up the campaign on the 4th of March, at Jug Tavern, Georgia. I trust that you will not disappoint me and that I may proceed with appropriate advertising."

The region of Maine where Bangs settled was not without its literary associations. Celia Thaxter at the Isles of

## *Retreat to Maine*

Shoals, Thomas Bailey Aldrich at Portsmouth, and Sarah Orne Jewett at South Berwick, already belonged to the past, although the latter two had died as recently as 1907 and 1909. Miss Jewett had written of this section of Maine in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 1896, a title which well describes the land lying back from the sea. But now with the development of summer colonies along the coast came other writers.

At York Harbor in these latter years were Thomas Nelson Page, William Dean Howells, and, for a time, Finley Peter Dunne. John Fox, Jr., and Agnes Repplier were visitors in York. At Kennebunkport were Margaret Deland and Booth Tarkington; at Biddeford Pool, George Barr McCutcheon; and at Ogunquit, Nathan Haskell Dole and Lyman Abbott. Kate Douglas Wiggin lived not far away at Hollis, Maine, and Barrett Wendell at Portsmouth. These authors were not such as would pool their mental resources to make a literary academy to lend new wonder to Maine's southern exposure. Howells had even deprecated the founding of the American Academy of Arts and Letters itself, although he was elected its first president and accepted the honor out of modesty. These folk preferred regular association with their neighbors who had not gone in for exercises such as would make them nationally conspicuous. Yet there were occasions, especially as distances were shortened by the advent of the automobile, when felicitous meetings took place. Howells in the course of time acquired a

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

Ford — when a Ford was still an American joke — and he pretended that he did not like to ride in one. “I am an aristocrat,” he said, “and I don’t like little boys shouting after me: ‘There goes a Ford! ’ ” But he rode in one, just the same, and on an occasion when he called on Bangs and found him away from home he wrote: “I came away hungering for your house and panting for your pergolas; your donkey stood monumental on a top of ground and waved a fond farewell to us with both ears.”

During these years Bangs contributed to magazines of all sorts and to syndicates. He published not so many books as in past years, but they averaged one a year. Unburdened by editorial duties — save as contributing editor to certain periodicals — and having plenty of time at his library desk in Maine or while traveling on trains to meet his lecture dates, his productivity was of a sort to make it more necessary than ever that he use pen-names. A ledger which he kept for the years 1909–1910 lists over a thousand separate acceptances. Over five hundred of these were published in the Harper periodicals, and the others were scattered among a score or more monthlies, weeklies, and newspaper syndicates. Bangs was not a high-priced writer. His customary charge was two cents a word for prose and fifty cents a line for verse. Sometimes he got more and sometimes he got less. Material which he had not contracted for in advance, he kept going through the mails to one periodical and then to another until it was finally accepted or thrown in the ash

## *Retreat to Maine*

can. He would have a hundred items out at a time, and the opening of his mail was always interesting — somewhat like gambling on the horses.

Some periodicals frequently published two or three contributions by Bangs in a single issue, and occasionally six or seven. The old pseudonyms Carlyle Smith and Wilberforce Jenkins continued to do duty, and such new names as Horace Dodd Gastit, A. Sufferan Mann, and Blakeney Gray, rose to casual notice. At one time the editor of *Munsey's* printed so many of Bangs's effusions that he took the liberty of attaching the name John M. Woods to one of them — “John from the Maine woods,” he explained.

Bangs's pen-names led to amusing complications. A moral postmistress once took it upon herself to inform Mrs. Bangs that her husband was receiving letters under the name of Carlyle Smith from a strange lady. The Canadian Parliament gave itself to a heated debate upon some remarks of Mr. Horace Dodd Gastit, which had appeared in *Harper's Weekly*. Major Pond in past years had been twice fooled by Bangs's *noms de plume*. He once wrote a letter to the *Chap-Book*, taking exception to some severe remarks of Periwinkle Podmore on the subject of Authors' Readings. The Major cited Bangs among others as a successful platform reader in refutation of Podmore's criticisms. In 1902, upon reading the first fruits of Wilberforce Jenkins in the *Herald*, Major Pond immediately decided that a new and great humorist was at hand and wrote Jenkins in anticipa-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

tion of getting him on the lecture platform. In October 1914 Bangs wrote gratis for a small Boston literary magazine, *The Cornhill Booklet*, some bright commentary called "Magazine Miscellany." He used for the first time a new pen-name, "Arthur Spencer Morley." On November 12th, Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, wrote Mr. Morley, saying: "I am entertained by your spicy criticism of contemporary magazines in a chance issue of The Cornhill Booklet which has drifted to my desk. I have no definite idea in making the request, but should you, by chance, be passing along Park Street, I wish you would drop in, for it is quite possible that a subject for an Atlantic essay may occur to one of us."

John H. Finley of the *New York Times* referred to Bangs as having "more literary pseudonyms than Homer had birth-places," and in connection with these many signatures Carolyn Wells contributed to *Harper's Magazine* the following verses on "Those New Poets":

Quite frequently it happens  
As I scan my Harper o'er,  
I see a goodly poet's name  
I've never seen before.

I think, "He's very clever  
At cutting verbal pranks;  
Another merry jingler  
Is added to our ranks."

### *Retreat to Maine*

And then the notion stirs me,  
And round my spirit hangs:  
Is it another pseudonym  
Of J—K—B—? ”

Bangs replied:

You do right well, O Lady Fair,  
In all the verse you see  
Behind the name that's written there  
To look for little me.  
And if you seek the prettiest  
Of all my magic spells,  
The wisest and the wittiest —  
Read those I sign  
Just “Carolyn  
Wells”!

In Bangs's later writings there is much that follows in the tracks of his earlier years, and there is also much that indicates an enrichment of his humor with elements of sentiment and pathos. Such a book as *Potted Fiction*, 1908, a series of condensed novels satirizing current best-sellers and “put up in thin slices for hurried consumers,” is nothing but canned journalism. *The Autobiography of Methuselah*, 1909, furnishes a very human life-story of the great patriarch and is an extension of the attitude Bangs had taken toward that Biblical hero in *A House-Boat on the Styx*. In one of the chapters Methuselah tells of the adventures of a great huntsman in his country, which the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

reader soon recognizes as a satire on ex-President Roosevelt's then recent hunting trip in Africa. The great huntsman, after shooting about every kind of antediluvian animal, is finally sent off by Methuselah, with a sly eye, in eager search for the Great Ara-Rat. *Jack and the Check-Book*, 1911, might better have been called "A Wall Street Fairy Book." It is a satire on high finance. In it the *New York Times* found more philosophy than jest. The book would make an excellent primer for financiers who mistake bubbles, reared by their own prestidigitations, for sound prosperity.

But in *A Little Book of Christmas*, 1912, and in the lecture reminiscences which make up *From Pillar to Post*, 1916, we find pathos mingled with the humor, and tears with the smiles. The later Christmas stories of Bangs catch at the throat and moisten the eye; and among his lecture adventures are recorded instances that strike deep into the heart, most notably exemplified in the chapters "Southern Hospitality" and "A Vagrant Poet." Commenting on Bangs's lecture reminiscences during their publication in the *Associated Sunday Magazine*, Montrose J. Moses said: "To my mind the ripeness of John Kendrick Bangs is detected in his *Leaves from a Lecturer's Note-Book*, which have been syndicated throughout the States during the past year. There is in this country a host of popular lecturers — but none quite so eagerly sought after as Mr. Bangs, who, since 1895, has scoured the country, visiting the smallest

## *Retreat to Maine*

towns, traveling along the most out of the way railroads, and meeting with the most varied assortment of adventures. These incidents are told in an entertaining, and penetrating manner. Here Mr. Bangs has had an opportunity of depicting American character in every locality — North, South, East and West; and one finds a fine commingling of humor and pathos, of excitement and calm, with portraiture which are thumb-nail sketches of the most vivid sort."

The most notable shift in Bangs's later writings is to be found in the steady flow of verses of sentiment, cheer, and homely philosophy, which now poured from his pen. These verses for a time ran along concurrently with his verses of social and political satire, but gradually preponderated and became a prevailing exercise. They are represented in *Songs of Cheer*, 1910, and *Echoes of Cheer*, 1912. Many of them find place, mingled with verses of other sorts, in *The Foothills of Parnassus*, 1914. For close on to ten years, from January 1913 until some months after his death in January 1922, a poem by Bangs was supplied daily to the press of the nation through the McClure Syndicate. Two of these yearly sequences were published in the collections *A Line o' Cheer for Each Day o' the Year*, 1913, and *The Cheery Way*, 1919.

Bangs found the writing of these verses good tonic for his mind, and he knew from many letters received from strangers in all parts of the country that these ditties were a tonic for others as well. Old ladies clipped them from the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

daily paper and preserved them as an aid to contentment. They served to bury the dead at funerals and to quicken the living with hope. They served for a time to put Bangs's youngest son through Yale, although that young man was too superior to read them. But Bangs didn't care. He knocked them off on the typewriter, jotted them down in notebooks, or spilled them forth while smoking an after-dinner cigar in his Maine retreat, keeping ahead of himself by writing about Christmas in August and about June in January. He therefore was mentally warm in winter and cool in summer. There is intellectual dexterity, as well as sentiment and shrewd observation, to be found in these daily ditties:

'Twixt Luck and Pluck  
    Lies but a letter —  
    Right good is Luck,  
        But Pluck is better.  
    For Luck you sit  
        And wait his wooing  
    But Pluck means Grit,  
        And Something Doing.

Pretty much everything of our terrestrial sphere which might be turned to pleasant use was subject to Bangs's versifying pen. Did he upon walking to his garden meet a butterfly, the butterfly became a friendly agent of Nature:

A Butterfly came by today  
    And I was glad to see

## *Retreat to Maine*

That as he sped along his way  
He waved his wings at me.

Did he, on the other hand, meet with a raucous rooster whose shrill welcome contrasted with the delicate greeting of the fritillary, the rooster too was celebrated in appropriate key:

I love to watch a Rooster crow,  
He's like so many men I know  
Who brag and bluster, rant and shout,  
And beat their manly chests without  
The first damn thing to crow about.

Bangs was an appreciator of Robert Herrick and other of the older English lyrists, and the mood of them was often upon him, especially when under the influence of Maine and the country-side. If Bangs had not the lyric gift, he could at least play on the pastoral pipe. There were in Bangs's poems what some thought a deeper note. William De Morgan, on reading the *Songs of Cheer*, found them "Elizabethan in method and Blakey in spirit." Bangs indulged no facile optimism which took for granted that all was right with the world. Like Browning, he knew the irony of Pippa's song and was aware that life was strangely mixed. His lines "To an American Beauty" attest the general truth:

My love's a rose,  
A perfect flower.

*John Kendrick Bangs*

Her beauty grows  
With every hour.

And when she smiles,  
A fragrance rare  
My heart beguiles  
With visions fair.

And when she pouts  
At me forlorn,  
I have no doubts  
About the thorn! <sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the best summation of Bangs's creed — a philosophy of thorough joy in life by which he came to live — is to be found in his poem "The Word," which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1908, and of which some lines have entered the sphere of familiar quotation. It is a poem of simplicity in which the interior lines rise to a swelling emotion and are framed by verses which hold the emotion in check and intellectualize the content:

To-day, whatever may annoy,  
The word for me is Joy, just simple Joy:  
    The joy of life;  
    The joy of children and of wife;  
    The joy of bright blue skies;  
    The joy of rain; the glad surprise

<sup>1</sup> From *The Foothills of Parnassus*. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company, Publishers.

### *Retreat to Maine*

Of twinkling stars that shine at night;  
The joy of wingéd things upon their flight;  
The joy of noon-day, and the tried  
True joyousness of eventide;  
The joy of labor, and of mirth;  
The joy of air, and sea, and earth —  
The countless joys that ever flow from Him  
Whose vast beneficence doth dim  
The lustrous light of day,  
And lavish gifts divine upon our way.

Whate'er there be of Sorrow  
I'll put off till To-morrow,  
And when To-morrow comes, why then  
'Twill be To-day and Joy again!

Such verses as we have quoted give evidence that Bangs's nature came in due course to the fullness of its stature. It was amid the surroundings of his Maine home, with the sweep of ocean before him and with the country of the pointed firs about him, that he came to a full realization of himself. And it was here, too, that for many years, through long summers, he gathered the energy and vigor necessary to carry him through the strenuous requirements of the lecture platform with their tens of thousands of miles of yearly travel. Without the basis of health borrowed from the sea and the pines, he could not have fulfilled so arduous a task — at least not with that constant and infectious buoyancy and salubriousness which so permeated his being and his discourse as to make him a spiritual refreshment to his

*John Kendrick Bangs*

nation-wide audiences. Nor had he found America-at-large of a character such as has sometimes been imposed upon it by some of our more notable *realists*, could he have aroused such sympathetic response and himself gained immeasurably from the experience.

*LECTURER AND SALUBRITY*

JOSEPH LEWIS FRENCH, in *Sixty Years of American Humor*, 1924, wrote: "Of all our American humorists John Kendrick Bangs undoubtedly had the closest individual following. He was a genius as a lecturer and traveled this country to its boundaries during the last fifteen years of his life, and wherever he went he left a memorable personal mark. He was one of the few literary artists of his own — or any other — time, who delighted to express himself orally — and even oratorically — and he became the most popular and notable humorous lecturer and after-dinner speaker this country has ever known."

That Mr. French correctly estimated Bangs's place among American humorous lecturers and after-dinner speakers, is not for us to say. Comparisons are sometimes odious, and concerning tastes there is often dispute. In the short and witty after-dinner speech Bangs was not the equal of such famous practitioners as Chauncey Depew, Horace Porter, Joseph Choate, or Simeon Ford, with whom he had been

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

privileged to speak in the banquet halls of New York; though in his later years — especially in Prohibition Days when appreciation of the flow of soul was not assisted by the flow of wine — it may be doubted if anyone surpassed him in the lengthier discourse commingled of humor and pathos wherewith he entertained notable gatherings in all sections of the nation. And as a humorous lecturer on the platform it would be folly to put him above or below such successful performers as Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, or his early contemporary Bill Nye.

Each of these humorists had his special platform manner. Artemus Ward, though gentle in manner and in voice, did not disdain the tricks of the vaudevillian. He called himself a showman, and he proved a delicious one. His hesitant stepping forth and bashful commencement of his lecture, his occasional pretending to forget where he was, and the general solemnity of his grave delivery, all added their effectiveness to his drolleries, as did such accessories as piano accompaniments, humorous pictures and panoramas, and various mechanical contrivances.

Of the humorous lecturers who succeeded Artemus Ward, Major Pond has interesting things to say in his book *Eccentricities of Genius*, 1901. Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby, the Great Civil War humorist, was a very popular lecturer in the years immediately following the conflict; but, says Major Pond, “he had none of the graces of the orator, and as the war fever abated, he gradually lost his hold, and re-

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

tired from the field." In speaking of Josh Billings, Pond says that he was a popular humorous lecturer for several years, but not a repeater. He had only one lecture, which he called *Milk*. "He insisted that a tumbler of milk should always be on the table in front of him, to which he never alluded in any way whatever. He always sat down when he lectured. His lecture was a shower of 'Josh Billings's' epigrams, sparkling as they tumbled over each other in falling from his lips, reflected from his bright eyes over his spectacles."

Of Bill Nye, Major Pond said that he found lecturing irksome, like everyone human who attempted to make a whole evening of fun. "The audience would fairly bubble over with laughter until every fun-loving muscle of their faces relaxed and left one sombre, wet-blanket expression all over the assembly; and there they had to sit, and the humorist had to proceed to the end of the program without a response. It was the same with Mark Twain until he took a running mate and interspersed pathos by introducing George W. Cable, and by means of a varied program achieved the greatest success ever known in the way of a platform entertainment."

Mark Twain disliked lecturing, but necessity drove him at various periods of his life to the platform. He acquitted himself of the task so greatly that he may well take first rank among American humorous lecturers as he does among American humorous writers. Of gigantic mold and fame,

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

he is likely to dwarf all others by sheer magnitude of personality. Major Pond, in his *Eccentricities*, published shortly after Mark Twain's return to America from his world-circling lecture tour, recognizes Mark Twain as the universal platform favorite.

All these humorous lecturers were of the *native* strain. There was something of the vernacular about all of them. Bangs was, rather, of the *genteel* tradition, but none the less American for that. He was, as T. L. Masson says in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1928, "tall, spare, unaffected, a thorough gentleman in mind and bearing, with a carrying voice, fund of anecdotes and charm of manner which made him a humorous speaker of rare distinction and taste." And whatever his place may be in the succession of American humorous lecturers, he was probably fairly characterized by the *Boston Transcript*, at the time of his death, as the most delightful personage upon the American lecture platform.

It was in January 1891 before a Yonkers audience for charitable purposes that Bangs first read his paper on *The Evolution of the Humorist*. This paper treated in serio-comic fashion the development of humor from the Garden of Eden to Bill Nye. It was well received, and Bangs was subsequently called to deliver it before various learned societies, clubs, and other audiences. He once delivered it for Major Pond, his friends and his neighbors; and, later in the evening at Pond's home, the Major in a fatherly way

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

remarked: "It was a good lecture, Bangs, and some day, maybe, you will find time to make it *shorter!*"

We do not know that Bangs found time to make his lecture shorter, but we do know that as the years rolled by he extended its scope, so that by 1900 its title had become *The Evolution of the Humorist from Adam to Ade*. By way of retaliation, George Ade, in his *More Fables*, 1900, wrote of a Ladies' Club where the entertainment provided was a lecture on English Literature from Beowulf to Bangs. Although Major Pond did not live to see Bangs rise to his later fame as a lecturer, the Major in January 1903, not long before his death, presented Bangs with a copy of *Eccentricities of Genius*. He wrote on its fly-leaf:

To John Kendrick Bangs  
a *man* whose make-up  
is *something* of all that  
is best in the friends I  
write about in this book  
of mine.

J. B. Pond

There are those who object to an author appearing in public to read from his writings. They find him a superfluous adjunct, or, possibly, if he be a poor reader — as many an author is — they find that he obscures rather than illuminates his product. Bangs was one who illuminated his product. Like Artemus Ward, however popular his written

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

humor may have been, he was one who came to express himself with added advantage by word of mouth.

“There is something in getting at the personality of an author through seeing him in the flesh that gives his writings a new meaning,” wrote a commentator at the close of the nineties. “In no case has this been more notable than with John Kendrick Bangs. He appeared before us with all his cultured impudence and we hardly knew how to take him at first, but it soon dawned upon us that we were listening to a species of humor as deliciously audacious as it was refined and clever. Mr. Bangs is a past-master of artistic incongruity and the effective way in which he masses diverse elements to produce his effects reveals the hand of a genuine artist. We have found his breezy humor nowhere more refreshing than when he appears before us in his own proper person and gives us a good-natured, friendly laugh over his inspired nonsense.”

Bangs was notable for the extemporaneity of his performances. “It is in his casual conversation that Bangs appears to best advantage,” wrote J. Henry Harper, “for his humorous observations are entirely spontaneous and contagious in their merriment. When his jocose or satirical sayings are read in cold print they at times strike one as studied; but in reality they are never so: his pen when once started on an idea runs along easily and unhaltingly, and his witty conceits are entirely uncomelled, being usually suggested by some thought of the moment that develops luxuriantly as he

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

writes." Harper used to say that Bangs's mind moved so rapidly that he knew the answer before one put the question. Harper tells of an elaborate luncheon party at the New York Yacht Club. Bangs, he says, was gazing out of the window and remarked on the appropriate coat of arms on the façade of the Yale Club across the street, bearing the motto *Lux et Veritas*. A member replied that unfortunately the Yacht Club possessed no coat of arms, but that if Bangs would supply a suitable motto, he would consult the governors with a view of rectifying the omission. Immediately Bangs proposed "*Ducks et Demi-Tasse*."

Other examples of Bangsian extemporaneity are to be picked up from newspaper reports of banquets. At a dinner tendered Seth Low upon his retirement from the presidency of Columbia, Bangs remarked that he was glad to find that although Columbia had lost its head, it still retained its faculties. At the banquet given at Portland, Maine, to welcome Admiral Peary back to the United States after his discovery of the North Pole, Bangs was unexpectedly called upon to speak. The papers report that he received an ovation, and among his various remarks concerning the then raging Cook-Peary controversy, his solution of the vexing problem as to why Peary had taken a Negro to the Pole instead of his First Officer, went the rounds of the press. Peary took with him, said Bangs, a faithful man of color, so that finally when we do get the whole story we shall have it in black and white.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

In the Century Association Memorials for 1922, Alexander Dana Noyes wrote: "In his intimate and personal associations, Bangs was a constant surprise; serious at one moment, actually erudite in conversation, he would the next moment be sparkling with wit and repartee, bubbling over with clever and spontaneous conceits." And John Corbin said: "In Bangs's talk one feels a freshness and aptness, a nimbleness and companionability that somehow or other elude the printed page." Critical estimates of Bangs's appearance as a reader in the nineties indicate that his auditors often found the more personal elements as exhibited in his introductory remarks or his frequent asides the more refreshing aspects of the entertainment.

When Bangs stepped from behind his books and his manuscripts to address his audiences directly — as he did during the last fifteen years of his life — he gave to those audiences something of the freshness and companionability which manifested itself in his relationship with his friends. His lectures became a personal and immediately creative manifestation through which he dispensed intangible commodities. However varied in subject matter were his half dozen principal talks in these years, no one of his lectures was ever written out or twice delivered in the same way. Bangs's lecturing was a creative act, and the character of his delivery was born of the immediate relation between himself and the special audiences he addressed. He did not speak down or speak up to his audiences, but he spoke to

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

them. There were times when his mouth did not fit their ears, but those times were seldom.

On addressing the Harvard Union in Memorial Hall, Cambridge, Bangs says: "As I mounted the rostrum bedlam broke loose: not necessarily as a tribute to myself, but because frenzy is the modern collegiate way of making a visitor feel welcome. Thunderous noises never yet classified shook the rafters — noises ranging from the hoarse clamor of an excited populace at the finish of some great Olympian event, to the somewhat uncertain cackle of a freshman voice changing from soprano to bass. Pandemonium did not reign: it poured. Not since I visited the London Zoo and witnessed there a fight between two caged lions to the excited, clamorous interest of all the other beasts imprisoned there, have I heard such a variegated din as greeted me on that occasion. That noise was the keynote of the evening." Sixteen hours later Bangs gave the same lecture to a Woman's Club near Boston, this time in a quiet drawing room before forty ladies who embroidered and crocheted while he talked, and here the points that raised the roof and shook the foundations of the Memorial Hall were modified to the applause of the tappings of thimbles upon the wooden frames of embroidery hoops.

Bangs was a favorite at annual banquets of societies in New York which met to celebrate in exile the glories of their native states. The Ohio Society of New York was particularly fond of him and adopted him as a native son be-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

cause he had spent so much time on Ohio railroads and in Ohio hotels. Members of the society found that Bangs knew their home state better than they did, and they delighted in the fresh glimpses he brought them of their native terrain. They had Bangs with them for the greatest of their feasts, when in January 1912 they dined at the Waldorf-Astoria the sixth of their sons to become President of the United States, William Howard Taft. The speakers on this occasion were President Taft, Henry van Dyke, Bangs, and the then Lieutenant-Governor of Ohio, Warren G. Harding. As a result of some aspersions cast upon the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at one of these banquets, Daniel Willard, president of the B. & O., sent Bangs a free pass for his road. On the reverse of it was printed:

This pass will be accepted for transportation WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY CERTIFICATE of Company Agent, attested by office stamp, that the bearer has presented evidence of being HOPELESSLY INDIGENT, DESTITUTE, AND HOMELESS, or an INMATE OF A CHARITABLE OR ELEEMOSYNARY INSTITUTION, a SOLDIER or SAILOR about to enter either a NATIONAL HOME or "A HOUSE BOAT ON THE STYX," or otherwise qualified as entitled to free transportation under Federal or State Laws.

It were impossible to do more than suggest the range of audiences Bangs addressed. If he was familiar with the larger banquet halls of New York, so also was he with their equivalents in the other cities of the land. If he spoke in the

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

leading clubs of New York, so also did he before the St. Botolph of Boston, the Cliff-Dwellers of Chicago, and the Bohemians of San Francisco. University Clubs in the various cities knew him, and he addressed academies, colleges, and schools, sometimes at commencements and sometimes upon less official occasions. He was popular in the larger lecture courses in the leading cities, the Columbia Institute of Arts and Letters, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Witherspoon Hall or the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. And of course, women's clubs, always hospitable to lecturers, continually sought him as a speaker.

Bangs spoke in political campaigns. He was a favorite at national or local conventions of bankers, of teachers, of ironmongers, of wool-dealers, of advertisers, of shoemakers, of theatrical managers, of lawyers, of publishers, of casket-makers. He spoke in cemeteries and in churches, at country fairs and in prisons. He spoke in the salons of the transatlantic liners, and once, when a train was stalled in the wilds of Nevada, he delivered a lecture in an observation car. During the World War he addressed soldiers and sailors at home and abroad and sometimes in mid-ocean. He delivered lectures to troops at the front — on occasions in total darkness. One of these talks was interrupted by an air raid. After the armistice he toured the camps of the Army of Occupation in Germany.

In *From Pillar to Post*, 1916, Bangs relates many of the adventures, pleasant and unpleasant, which he met with on

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

his lecture tours. He was grateful for all of them, for they formed some of the most cherished experiences of his life. In a prefatory note, Bangs said in reference to his lecture managers: "If sometimes in their zeal to keep me busy they have booked me in Winnipeg on Monday night, in New Orleans on Tuesday night, with little side-trips to San Diego, California, and Presque Isle, Maine, on Wednesday and Thursday, not to mention grand finales at Omaha and Key West on Friday and Saturday, I view that sequence rather as a tribute to my agility than as a matter to be unduly captious about. It is a manifestation of a confidence in my powers to overcome the limitations of time and space that I think upon with an expanding head, if not with a swelling heart, and whether this required annihilation of distance has been wholly agreeable or not it has enabled me to see more of my own country than I otherwise could have seen, and to that extent, I hope, has made a better American of me."

Bangs was a good deal more than an entertainer, and this fact was responsible for his success as a lecturer. He had a mission, and his mission was to spread the gospel of humor. In his latter years the old Nathan arose in him, and the lecture platform became his pulpit. Bangs was interested in humor not merely as an end in itself but as a means to an end. He believed that the humorist had reason to be proud of his calling. He did not agree with Matthew Arnold that the American humorist was a national calamity. He main-

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

tained that “ in the whole history of our humor, from Captain John Smith through Franklin, Irving, Lowell, and Artemus Ward, to Mark Twain, Bill Nye, Ade, and Dunne, we have shown an exuberance of feeling and a resentment of restraint, that have helped to make of us the free and independent people that we are.” Bangs further held that nations without humor were unstable communities, and that it was only after the people of a nation developed a sense of humor that that nation could be registered upon the roll call of civilization.

Bangs emphasized the humane rather than the cruel elements of humor, though his lectures contained examples of both. In his review of Dr. Boris Sidis’s *Psychology of Laughter*, for the *Literary Digest*, 1913, Bangs suggested the heights to which laughter might attain when he said: “ We judge from the author’s intimations that laughter goes through certain sequences of sublimation and super-sublimation, Ossas of mirth, piled upon Pelions of cachinnation, sublimating, and sublimating, and sublimating again, until from the coarse guffaw of an amused mob enjoying to the full the laughter induced by scenes of suffering, we reach that inner glow of the soul which comes to all reverent worshippers of the divine, which is the ultimate supreme manifestation of joy, and therefore, tho outwardly indicated only by a rapt expression of the countenance, or by a fire of the eye, is none the less the very essence of laughter.”

Bangs’s variegated work as a lecturer brought him to the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

conclusion that he had little sympathy with creed. His career as a lecturer on the larger scale had begun on his first tour of the far West in the autumn of 1906. In an interview for the *Boston Herald*, he spoke of the various buildings in which he delivered his lectures. Many of them were religious edifices, and Bangs said he found being an Episcopalian most convenient: "As Disraeli said, it interferes neither with my business nor my religion. When I was out West, I spoke one night in a rink, the next in a Baptist Church, the next in a Masonic Temple — used on Sundays as a meeting place for Christian Scientists — the next in a Mormon Hall, and so on. I was just as comfortable in one place as in another. It comes of being an Episcopalian." Bangs failed to mention that he also lectured in a Synagogue, but doubtless, if we may judge from later experiences, he felt as comfortable there as elsewhere.

It was on this Western tour that Bangs first delivered his most popular lecture, *Salubrities I Have Met*. The title was originally *Celebrities I Have Met*, but a printer's error suggested "Salubrities." Thereafter Bangs used the term. The new title proved a more apt one, for the special qualities which Bangs chose to emphasize in the celebrities he spoke of were salubrious ones, and the new title permitted him to speak of other than celebrated persons and thus to more widely humanize his discourse.

*Salubrities I Have Met* was a lively running talk about more or less famous men and women whom Bangs had

## *Lecturer and Salubrity*

known in the course of his career. It usually ran for an hour and one half to two hours, touching on both the grave and the gay, and included anecdotes of statesmen, authors, philanthropists, and less known, but no less interesting, persons, such as Pullman porters, hoboes, and other representatives of humanity, whose gifts might enrich the theme. In the earlier years of its delivery, the lecture ended with a presentation of the character of Theodore Roosevelt, as one of the greatest of salubrities. Bangs customarily closed the lecture by reading an imaginary interview, "A Strenuous Day at Oyster Bay." Roosevelt himself had read this interview when it appeared in the *New York Herald*. He had expressed himself as "delighted" with it, and said it was the most pleasant projection of himself "as he would like to be" that he had read. In later years the lecture closed with a vivid personal characterization of Mark Twain. As Bangs was frequently called upon for return dates, other lectures which he gave in the years before America's entrance into the World War were a second installment of salubrities, called *More Salubrities*, and an estimate of American Character, based upon his observations while touring, called *We, Us & Company*.

Speaking of Bangs in these middle-years of lecturing, the *Springfield Republican* said: "Humor is not worth while unless it is sweet, and must otherwise degenerate into mere fun. The true humorist is also by virtue of his disposition a spirit of light and tender fancy, or of deep and seri-

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

ous purpose — a Hood or a Mark Twain — and in this class is to be reckoned that notable gay entertainer, John Kendrick Bangs, who, like the witty philosopher, Charles Henry Webb, has shown both sides of the pleasant conception of life.” Noting Bangs’s wit as being fresh and epigrammatic without being acrid, the *Atlanta Journal* described *Salubrities* as being “as genial and kindly as one of Dickens’s happiest stories. Mr. Pickwick himself couldn’t have uttered a jollier philosophy, and Samuel Weller never had droller anecdotes to tell.” Commenting editorially, the *Worcester Gazette* said: “The lecture by J. Kendrick Bangs, the famous humorist, last night in Mechanics Hall was a signal success, not alone from the part taken by the lecturer but from the evident fact that, in this pictorial age, an out and out lecture is a possibility. It was a delight to behold as well as to hear the speaker; his form unsupported by mayor, alderman, or even a clergyman, had the whole stage to itself, and the one thousand or more people who held the hall will not forget the personality of the man whose voice and words charmed them for the evening.” It is evident from these statements that Bangs, by practising what he preached, had become a salubrity himself.

*PATRIOT: WAR AND DEATH*

W

HEN the United States entered the World War April 6, 1917, Bangs was lecturing in Montana. Between that time and April 6, 1918, he delivered approximately two hundred lectures in twenty-eight states of the Union and Canada, traversing in his travels many other states besides. He was tremendously thrilled that America had at long last gone into action. His lectures took on more and more a patriotic tone, and the note of oratory arose in his speeches. The character of *We, Us & Company* lent itself particularly to the new needs of popular patriotic appeal. Bangs's opportunities to observe America at this time from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Canada to the Gulf, were pretty much unrivaled; and he was able to give a graphic account of national activity to his enthusiastic audiences. On April 7, 1918, he completed his assignments with a talk before sailors and soldiers at the 44th Street Theatre, New York; and on April 16 sailed on the *Chicago* for Europe.

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

He delivered *Salubrities* in the saloon of the *Chicago*, and gave two addresses, fore and aft, to the troops on board. Arriving in Paris, he lectured at the American Soldiers and Sailors Club, addressed the American Club, spoke elsewhere in Paris, and also gave many talks before American contingents at the front. He dined with Major General Edwards of the Yankee Division in the defensive sector north of Toul. Elsie Janis was there at the time, and Bangs was much amused when General Edwards, spying a brigadier general's insignia on Miss Janis's lapel, looked at her reproachfully and said: "What, Miss Janis! Would you flirt with a mere brigadier?"

In Paris, Bangs encountered Quentin Roosevelt peering into a window on the Avenue de l'Opéra. He asked him if he had any message for his father back in the States. Quentin said: "Tell him to go to Washington and shoot everyone in the Aviation Corps above the rank of major." On returning to America, Bangs met the elder Roosevelt at luncheon at the Colony Club, and delivered Quentin's message. Roosevelt ground his teeth for a moment, and then exploded: "Very good, Bangs! Very good! But why limit it to Aviation?" These Rooseveltian remarks may sound traitorous; but deeds speak louder than words, and Quentin was to die in action almost immediately thereafter.

Bangs's youngest son, serving at this time in a unit in the Toul sector, was surprised on a May night to see his father suddenly rise before him out of the darkness. Although



BANGS IN FRANCE, 1918



## *Patriot: War and Death*

not an officer of the Red Cross, Bangs was enrolled in its Department of Public Information. He appeared in its full regalia, having been granted a permit to wear the Sam Browne belt. He made a very military figure — although his salute was a bit of a wave of the hand. The son recalls during an air raid that night seeing his father standing on a hill-top in the moonlight with a helmet on his head and a long white night-gown adorning the rest of his anatomy. Pajamas had come in after the nineties, and Bangs never got beyond that decade as far as evening dress was concerned.

Bangs had gone to Europe on behalf of the American Committee for Devastated France. On his return to the United States, he devoted his summer to raising funds for that organization by lecturing along the Atlantic seaboard at coastal resorts from Newport to Bar Harbor, and at other haunts of wealth such as Tuxedo, Mount Kisco, Lenox, and the vales of the White Mountains. He also addressed many other audiences on behalf of the American Committee, from the Century Association in New York to the Navy Yard at Kittery, and from Y.M.C.A. rosters and congregations in churches to public gatherings in Madison Square. In the process he developed the first of his war lectures, *Light and Shade in the Land of Valor*. This lecture he delivered to one hundred and sixty audiences in the United States and Canada before in May 1919 he again sailed for France.

*Light and Shade in the Land of Valor* was an interpretation of the Spirit of France and the Allies in the darkest

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

period of the war. Nicholas Murray Butler, who heard this lecture at the Century Association, said that it made a very profound impression upon everyone present. Reports of the lecture indicate that it was presented with quick alternations of humor and pathos and that the audiences were deeply affected. The *Evening Star* of Winchester, Virginia, said: "Never before has an Empire audience clamored insistently for a speaker to talk again the same evening after he had completed a lecture of more than an hour. Repeatedly during his lecture . . . there was scarcely a dry eye in the house but he brushed away the tears almost immediately with a story that filled you with pride in the confident spirit of American boys, while he made you laugh at their inexhaustible love of fun." And from Albany came the report: "The meeting of last Sunday night was one of the most profoundly patriotic successes. Many people were turned away. It is estimated that Mr. Bangs addressed 1800 Albanians. It was the general opinion that no speaker has so thoroughly thrilled our people."

Although the war was over when Bangs sailed for Europe in the late spring of 1919, conditions in Europe remained a principal interest to Americans. Bangs's observations at this time convinced him that "the granting of the armistice when we had Germany on her knees was the greatest crime ever recorded on the pages of history. Just as the strong arm of right was about to deal a crushing blow it was suddenly made to fall, paralyzed." The Germans, he said,

## *Patriot: War and Death*

“have no sense of shame or repentance; no sense of humiliation or defeat. They are still resolved that the day of triumph will dawn.”

Bangs covered France from Toulouse to Lille, Belgium from Lille to Ypres, France again along the Hindenburg line to Rheims, and Germany from Metz to Coblenz and the American Bridge-head. During this period he lectured continuously in France and to the Army of Occupation in Germany. He also spoke en route to France aboard the *Savoie* and twice aboard the *Espagne* on the return to America. He talked in Europe with Counts, Concierges, Coachmen, Doctors, Lawyers, Merchants, Peasants, Shopkeepers, Army Officers, and Enlisted Men, and lived in the devastated regions. He embodied his experiences in two new lectures, *America Abroad* and *In the Wake of War*.

*America Abroad* was a sequel to *Light and Shade* and comprised a close inspection of the whole theater of war and the ruin wrought therein, some account of the Spirit of America overseas, our boys along the Rhine, and intimate glimpses into prevailing conditions at the close of hostilities and the beginning of Reconstruction. *In the Wake of War* was an account of the human side of reconstruction work in France, bearing particularly upon Woman’s Work in the War Zone. As a director of the American Committee for Devastated France, Bangs enjoyed exceptional advantages to study American effort in the war-torn regions.

Back in America, Bangs again devoted his summer to the

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

American Committee, spending most of his time in the far West, and not returning East until late September. His audiences were, as usual, varied, ranging from that at "Château-sur-Mer," the home of Senator Wetmore in Newport, to Rotary Clubs in western cities. *Town Topics*, commenting somewhat antiseptically on the talk at Newport, said: "At the Pembroke Joneses last year Mr. Bangs was gay and spirited and evoked laughter. At the Wetmores he was profoundly pathetic, if not dramatic, and left half the women in lachrymal convulsions when he exhibited his flowers of rhetoric on the ruins which show nothing but the flowers of nature marking the last resting-place of our beloved American boys . . . and Colonel Willard . . . stretched his neck so far to catch every word, that this old friend, Admiral Brownson, was almost compelled in his anxiety to put forth a sustaining hand to keep the old warrior from losing his balance." Concerning Bangs's lecture at the University Club, Los Angeles, B. R. Baumgardt, himself a leading lecturer on scientific subjects, reported to Bangs's New York managers: "I do not recall ever having heard a finer discourse, polished and discriminating. . . . To say that he made a deep impression on the members is not sufficient. We have had the biggest speakers in the country address the Club, but the consensus of opinion was that none has given greater satisfaction than Bangs. Personally I consider him the Dean of American Lecturers."

On returning East, Bangs resigned from the Board of

## *Patriot: War and Death*

Directors of the American Committee for Devastated France. In accepting the resignation, Myron T. Herrick, president of the Board, said: "In connection with Mr. Bangs's letter of resignation I should like to say that in my opinion, the money raised throughout the Country during our recent financial campaign was only a small part of the compensation of the campaign to the American Committee or of its value to the United States. Our campaign was most timely. All over the Country, at about that time, there seemed to have been started up by concerted action, a campaign of propaganda against France at the moment when it could do France the most harm. At that moment this campaign of ours was started. It enabled the people connected with it . . . to strike against that propaganda. In performing that work, what Mr. Bangs said here, there, and everywhere in his forceful way of speaking, did more than any one thing to accomplish that purpose." For his work on behalf of the Devastated Regions, the Government of France made Bangs a *chevalier* of the Legion of Honor.

Bangs continued his lecturing during 1920 and 1921 with increasing national appreciation. He was a star performer so emphatically in demand that it was impossible for his managers to meet the offers. If the lecture platform had become his pulpit, it had also become his editorial chair — for he was free in his utterances to comment upon matters of moment uppermost in the mind of the nation. Almost everywhere he went, he was interviewed by the news-

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

papers, and his comments were spread broadcast over the land. He was particularly interested in the candidacy of General Wood for the Republican nomination for the Presidency. Wherever and whenever he legitimately could, he tried to further that candidacy, and he was in constant communication with Wood and his managers in Chicago.

Bangs found in the states of the Union that he visited that General Wood was easily the popular candidate. Where he was not first choice, he was invariably second. After Wood's defeat, Bangs wrote in the *New York Tribune* in defense of the Wood support, which had been viciously attacked in certain quarters: "That support has been a popular support if there ever was such a thing. It has been my privilege to visit every state in the American Union during the last three years, and I know whereof I speak when I say that in every section of the United States there was a spontaneous desire on the part of the public that General Wood should round out his career in the White House."

Wood, after his defeat for the nomination, indulged in no public recriminations, except to defend his backers against malign misrepresentations. However, in a letter to Bangs, written several days after the Republican Convention, he succinctly stated his personal judgment of the means employed to bring about the nomination of Warren G. Harding. "The cabal did its work," he wrote, "through methods which are a menace to government by the people." George Harvey had years before told Bangs that Harding

## *Patriot: War and Death*

would be the successor to Woodrow Wilson; and Harvey had been the principal manipulator in bringing about the Harding nomination. As a reward, Harding, on becoming President, named Harvey Ambassador to Great Britain. Wood, according to his campaign managers, had had the intention, if elected, of doing the same for Bangs.

As a maker of Presidents, Harvey became famous. Few people know, however, that when Harvey first suggested the name of Woodrow Wilson for the Presidency at the now famous Lotos Club dinner of 1906, he was more sanguine of the effect his speech, spread broadcast by the Associated Press, would have in stimulating the sales of Wilson's *A History of the American People* than he was of Wilson becoming from that moment a seriously considered candidate for the highest of political honors. The Wilson *History* had been published by Harper & Brothers in 1902, and had not been doing particularly well.

Bangs was not only disappointed but troubled by the defeat of General Wood. He admired the General this side idolatry, and he despised political intrigue of the kind that had defeated him. But he respected Harding and liked him, and played an indirect rôle in the Republican campaign of 1920. Toward the close of June, Harding wrote Bangs from Washington: "I naturally should expect a sympathetic thought from you, because we have been partners in crime at the banquet table on more than one occasion, and I hold you in such high esteem that I am sure you must have a bit

### *John Kendrick Bangs*

of considerate regard for me. . . . It is nice to be assured of your support. I know that you can be very influential because you have the gift of speech and pen which makes your influence very far-reaching. . . . The big thing to do just now is to return a political party of conscience and capacity to the position where it can be of service to the country."

As the campaign came to a head in the autumn, Bangs wrote a pamphlet, "Why I am for Harding. By a Man Who Wanted Wood." This was widely distributed in late October, and its substance spread in the newspapers. Harding wrote: "I appreciate sincerely the help you are giving to our common cause, but I am especially pleased to think that your investigations have brought you to believe in my sincerity of purpose and in my devotion to the republic and its peoples. I can only, in modesty, promise to do my best to justify the faith of those who give me their confidence and support. And let me say to you that I am a real idealist and an altruist handicapped only by an uncontrollable instinct to keep at least one foot on the ground while I am reaching for the stars." Bangs did not live to learn that Harding should have kept two feet on the ground while reaching for the stars. He lunched with the President at the Executive Mansion shortly after his inauguration, but outside of the serving of cocktails as a minor breach of etiquette in a nation constitutionally dry, there were then no visible signs of decline.

## *Patriot: War and Death*

The last summer of his life Bangs spent at Laon in the devastated regions of France, he and his wife taking charge of the Guest House of the American Committee, still active in rehabilitating the lives of war sufferers in that district. Bangs was not well, but his heart was enlisted in the enterprise and he spent himself, personally conducting visiting Americans to points of interest from Verdun to Rheims, that they might better understand the needs of the American Committee and be led to contribute generously to the cause. Describing Bangs as he saw him at this time, James Barnes, in his reminiscences *From Then till Now*, 1934, says: "He was doing the work of two or three men in the reconstruction of the war-crushed villages into which Americans were pouring their money. He looked old and worn, yet every now and then the spark of his familiar humor flared, and he would lift one eyebrow and lower the other in the old, fascinating way."

On returning to America in late September, Bangs almost immediately began a strenuous lecture tour, no doubt fortifying his own waning strength by the lecture he now most frequently delivered, the title of which was *The Incorrigible Optimist*. Returning from Cleveland, Ohio, in late October, after addressing a banquet of the Casket Manufacturers Association, he remarked that he might to advantage have died in their midst; but he continued on, fulfilling his engagements through December 19, when he went to Atlantic City for a Christmas rest. A mortal disease

## *John Kendrick Bangs*

had been gnawing at his vitals, but the source of it, an intestinal sarcoma, was not discovered until an operation laid it bare at the close of December. Bangs died under a secondary operation at Atlantic City, January 21, 1922, at the age of fifty-nine. Like his father before him, in his later years he had not taken proper rest.

Since the entrance of America into the War, Bangs had devoted about a quarter of his time to charitable causes. His first public appearance of 1921 had been on January 2 at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia when with George Wharton Pepper, General Pershing, and others, he had opened the Hoover Drive for Starving Children of Europe. It had been Bangs's mission to outline the needs of Europe, and on that one occasion over \$200,000 had been raised and over 20,000 European children "adopted." He had joined in other causes of this kind during the year, and had spent four months in the Devastated Regions. During his three weeks at death's door between his two operations, he was to find that he had won a rich reward. The news of his illness brought hundreds of letters of appreciation to him from all parts of the country, many of them from people whom he had never met; and he was much comforted. Particularly was he comforted by the Reverend John Fearnley, the rector of St. Peter's-by-the-Sea, Ogunquit, who came to Atlantic City to spend the last week with him. Bangs was a vestryman of St. Peter's, and Mr. Fearnley, his pastor, read to him continuously during the last days. Mr. Fearnley,

## *Patriot: War and Death*

later, after the funeral service at St. Bartholomew's, New York, read the burial service at Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, where Bangs was interred under the shadow of the shaft of Nathan and near the stone of Francis N.

Bangs's last message to anyone outside his own family was sent to William Lyon Phelps of Yale, whose large humanity and genius for friendliness appealed to him as the ideal marks of the true humorist. "Give Billy Phelps my love," he said, "and tell him that although I'm prostrate I know the world is safe in his hands."

Bangs had long considered the House-Boat on the Styx as possibly his sole refuge for the future. That he now resides in that genial atmosphere in association with Shakespeare and Hamlet, Sir Walter Raleigh and Socrates, or, possibly, with America's master-humorist, his friend Mark Twain, we cannot say. All we know is that sometime subsequent to his death, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to whom he had dedicated *The Pursuit of the House-Boat*, reported that he had had a message from Bangs from the bourne from which no traveler returns. But Sir Arthur failed to declare whether the locale of that bourne was from over the Styx or not.

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## *APPENDIX AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

**I**N the course of this biography some fifty of Bangs's books have been mentioned. Books not mentioned in the text are: *A Prophecy and A Plea*, 1897; *The Inventions of the Idiot*, 1904; *The Worsted Man*, 1905; *Andiron Tales*, 1907; *Alice in Blunderland*, 1907; *The Genial Idiot*, 1908; *The Real Thing and Three Other Farces*, 1909; *Mollie and the Unwisenman Abroad*, 1910; *A Quest for Song*, 1915; and *Half Hours with the Idiot*, 1917. A descriptive bibliography of Bangs's *First Editions and Some Others* is to be found in *The Yale University Library Gazette* for January 1933.

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*John Kendrick Bangs*

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## INDEX

Abbott, Lyman, 257  
*Acta Columbiana*, 36-62, 92  
Adams, Franklin P., 191, 240  
Ade, George, 273, 281  
*Adventures of a Brownie, The*, 27  
*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The*, 71, 72  
*Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The*, 28  
Aesop, 27, 77  
Alcott, Louisa May, 28  
Alden, Henry Mills, 98, 100, 201  
Alden, John, 4  
Aldine Club, The, 78, 111, 113-115, 168-170, 214, 215  
Aldrich, Thomas Bailey, 28, 115, 116, 184, 205, 215, 257  
Alexander, John W., 235  
Allen, James Lane, 198, 232  
Almighty, The, 197  
Alphonso XIII, 77  
American Academy of Arts and Letters, 204-205, 257  
American after-dinner speaking, 157-158, 269-270  
American Committee for Devas-  
tated France, 287, 289, 291, 295  
American humorous lecturers, 269-272  
*Americanization of Edward Bok, The*, 150  
Amherst College, 95  
Ananias Club, 78  
Anglomania, 67, 68, 89  
Anthony, Susan B., 78  
Archer, William, 202  
Aristophanes, 164  
Armistice, 288  
Arnold, Sir Edwin, 200, 201  
Arnold, Matthew, 70, 116, 280  
*Artemus Ward: His Book*, 20  
Asbury, Bishop, 9, 11  
Ashe, E. M., 107, 108  
Association of the Bar of the City of New York, 14, 15, 34  
Astor, Col. and Mrs. John Jacob, 246  
Astor House, 85  
*Atlanta Journal*, 284  
Atlantic City, 295, 296  
*Atlantic Monthly, The*, 89, 116, 124, 125, 260, 266

## Index

Attwood, Francis Gilbert, 63, 69  
Auerbach, Joseph S., 30, 299  
Aunt Deedee, *see* Nassau, Mrs. E. L.  
Austin, Alfred, 202  
Authors Club, The, 112  
Authors' Readings, 91, 116-118, 259  
*Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, The*, 129, 131

Bacheller, Irving, 131, 248  
Bacon, Francis, 83, 84  
Baird, Henry M., 201  
Baker, Ray Stannard, 211  
Balestier, C. Wolcott, 121  
Baltimore & Ohio, 278  
Bangs, Edward, 6  
Bangs, Francis Hyde (son), 106, 144, 159, 160, 237, 264, 286  
Bangs, Francis Sedgwick (brother), 16, 97  
Bangs, Howard Russell (son), 106, 237  
Bangs, John Kendrick (1862-1922):

ANCESTRY AND INHERITANCE: Edward Bangs, Pilgrim Father, 4-5; Jonathan Bangs, generator of humor, 5-7; Lemuel Bangs (great-grandfather), loquacity and independency, 7-8, 15; Nathan Bangs (grandfather), power as preacher, prolificity as writer, independency as thinker, 8-12, 15, 16, 17, 165, 167, 176, 280, 297; Francis N. Bangs (father), fearless advocacy, mastery of invective, powerful personality, brilliancy of wit, swiftness of men-

Bangs, John Kendrick (cont.): tal processes a maternal inheritance and Gallic in quality, 12-17, 22, 23, 25, 29-35, 87, 88, 297

HUMOR, CHARACTERISTICS, ATTAINMENTS: place among American humorists, 104, 160, 269, 272; representative of satire born of *Life* and University Wits, 61-64, 99, 100; jester of his literary generation, 120; contribution to juvenile literature, 106-109; quality of his ghost stories, 125, 126, 179; his humor a mixture of classical and native strains, 131; obviousness and subtlety of his humor, 172; sanity of his humor, 182; popularity of his humor, 128, 147, 160, 167, 182; astonishing variety of his creations, 181; his comic character The Idiot, 129-130, 232; quality of later writings, 261-267; child disclaimer, 23; boyhood fluency, 24-25; waggish turn of mind, 29; jocund intelligence, 65; assiduity and prolificity, 65, 258-261; life-long independency, 24, 102-103, 136, 138, 208, 226-227, 251, 281; lively conversationalist, 155, 276; extemporaneity, 274-275; companionability, 276; geniality and salubriousness, 267-268; bibliophilic impulses, 109-111; joke-smith, 123; student of humor, 123; presiding genius of "The Editor's Drawer," 183; humorist of *Harper's Weekly*,

## Index

Bangs, John Kendrick (cont.) : 124; conception of humor as a national asset and its scope, 280-281; connoisseur of social pictorial satire and influence in its development, 110-111, 189-190; his dramatic criticism, 228-229, 233, 237, 238; his literary criticism, 180-183, 202; political influence, 77-79, 208, 215-231, 241-242, 255-256, 292-294; popularity as a lecturer, 262, 269; impressions of, as speaker, reader, lecturer, post-prandialist, 41-43, 55, 118, 158, 193, 244, 269, 272, 274, 283, 284, 288, 290; master missionary in the humanization of Hades, 165

BOOKS: *Alice in Blunderland*, 298; *Andiron Tales*, 298; *Autobiography of Methuselah, The*, 261; *Bicyclers and Three Other Farces, The*, 177, 186; *Bikey the Skicycle*, 232; *Booming of Acre Hill, The*, 147, 180, 181; *Chafing-Dish Party, A*, 187; *Cheery Way, The*, 263; *Cobwebs from a Library Corner*, 181; *Coffee and Repartee*, 116, 128-132, 160, 188; *Coffee and Repartee and The Idiot*, 128; *Dramatic Evening, A*, 186; *Dreamers: a Club, The*, 180, 188-190; *Echoes of Cheer*, 263; *Emblemland*, 232; *Enchanted Type-writer, The*, 180; *Fatal Message, The*, 186; *Foothills of Parnassus, The*, 26, 263; *From Pillar to Post*, 262, 279; *Genial Idiot, The*, 298; *Ghosts I Have Met*, 126, 179; *Half-Hours*

Bangs, John Kendrick (cont.) : *with Jimmieboy*, 107-108; *Half-Hours with the Idiot*, 298; *House-Boat on the Styx, A*, 160, 163-175, 179, 249, 261, 278; *Idiot, The*, 118, 147, 161, 190; *Idiot at Home, The*, 180, 181; *In Camp with a Tin Soldier*, 107, 108; *Inventions of the Idiot, The*, 298; *Jack and the Check-Book*, 262; *Katherine, A Travesty*, 92-96, 98; *Line o' Cheer for Each Day o' the Year, A*, 263; *Little Book of Christmas, A*, 262; *Lorgnette, The*, 88-89; *Mantelpiece Minstrels, The*, 107; *Mephistopheles. A Profanation*, 96-98; *Mollie and the Unwise man*, 232; *Mollie and the Unwise man Abroad*, 298; *Monsieur D'en Brochette*, 241; *Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica*, 158, 160, 161-163; *Mr. Munchausen*, 229; *Mrs. Raffles*, 241; *New Waggings of Old Tales*, 90-92; *Olympian Nights*, 232; *Over the Plum-Pudding*, 229; *Paste Jewels*, 179; *Peeps at People*, 180, 188, 190; *Potted Fiction*, 261; *Prophecy and A Plea, A*, 298; *Proposal under Difficulties, A*, 86-87; *Pursuit of the House-Boat, The*, 160, 174-177, 297; *Quest for Song, A*, 298; *Real Thing and Three Other Farces, The*, 298; *Rebellious Heroine, A*, 177-178; *R. Holmes & Co.*, 239; *Roger Camerden*, 89-90, 126; *Songs of Cheer*, 263, 265; *Three Weeks in Politics*, 187, 146, 190; *Tiddleywink's Poetry*

## Index

Bangs, John Kendrick (cont.):  
*Book, The*, 106, 107; *Tiddley-wink Tales*, 106, 107; *Toppleton's Client*, 127-128; *Uncle Sam Trustee*, 230-231, 232; *Water Ghost and Others, The*, 125, 126, 128, 166; *Worsted Man, The*, 298; *Young Folk's Minstrels, The*, 187

EDITOR OF: *Acta Columbiana*, 36-62; *Life*, 62-86; *Munsey's Weekly*, 102-104; *Harper's Magazine*, "Editor's Drawer," 99-101, 104, 123, 143, 151, 155, 180, 183-191; *Harper's Bazar*, "Facetiae," 99, 104, 123, 129, 180, 187-190; *Harper's Young People*, 104, 123; *Harper's Weekly*, 206-228; *Literature*, 180, 183, 200-205; *New Metropolitan Magazine, The*, 233-236; *Puck*, 239-242

LECTURES: *Evolution of the Humorist, The*, 3, 122, 123, 158, 272, 273; *Salubrities I Have Met*, 282-284, 286; *More Salubrities*, 283; *We, Us & Co.*, 283, 285; *Light and Shade in the Land of Valor*, 287, 288; *America Abroad*, 289; *In the Wake of War*, 289; *Incorrigeable Optimist, The*, 295

PLAYS: *Lady Teazle*, 238, 242-246, 250; *Tomorrowland*, 246, 249; *Man from Now, The*, 249; *Belle of the Bowery, The*, 249; *Candidate, The*, 250; *Katherine*, 250

PSEUDONYMS: 258-261. See Smith, (T.) Carlyle; Jones, Shakespeare; Drake, Gaston

Bangs, John Kendrick (cont.): V.; Podmore, Periwinkle; Jenkins, Wilberforce; Gastit, Horace Dodd; Gray, Blakeney; Mann, A. Sufferan; Witherup, Anne Warrington; Morley, Arthur Spencer; Woods, John M.; Dingus

VARIOUS WRITINGS: Aesthetic Party, An, 50; Alice in Stage-land, 240; Beware of the Goat, 52; Boomlets, 77-79; Buffalo Bill at Windsor, 75-76; Butterfly, 264; By-the-Way (column or page), 79; Carleton Barker, First and Second, 126; Casual Comment, 203-204; Chum to Potentates, 77; Concord Philosophers, 73; Confession, A., 18, 21; Cuban Situation, The, 210, 225-226; Frenchmen as Edibles, 84-85; Freshman Primer, 51; Genial Idiot Papers, 232, 238; Ghost Club, The, 166; Golliacs, The, 187; Imaginary Interviews, 188; Imperious Jumbo, 76; Inexpert Waitress, The, 188; Involvular Club, The, 189; Jimmieboy in Trustland, 238-239; Leaves from a Lecturer's Note-Book, 262; Liars Club, The, 78; Limericks, 55, 56, 69; Literary Notes (*Harper's*), 180-183; Little Elfman, The, 108; Little Peach, The, 51; Luck and Pluck, 264; Markus Twain, 72; Mayor Roosevelt, 86; Mayor's Lamps, The, 146; Monkey Ancestry, 3; Mother Goose and the Higher Criticism, 21; Mrs. Spriggins, 80-

## Index

Bangs, John Kendrick (cont.) : 81; *My Dog*, 26; *Nemesis of Perkins, The*, 146; *November, 79*; *Nursery Treasure, A.*, 22; *Octet in Cigar-Box Dialect*, 131; *Oscar's Little Book*, 50; *Overcoat, The*, 189; *Paradise Club, The*, 147; *Periwinkle Papers*, 229; *Philippine Policy*, 224; *Pilgrim's Progress, The*, 80; *Podmore Letters, The*, 191-198; *Rooster, The*, 265; *Southern Hospitality*, 262; *Spanish War Correspondents*, 189; *Spectrophone, The*, 238, 249; *Spotlets (column)*, 98; *Strenuous Day at Oyster Bay, A.*, 283; *Teddy in Blunderland*, 238; *To an American Beauty*, 265-266; *To Mark Twain*, 248; *Uvae Acidulosa*e, 53; *Vagrant Poet, A.*, 262; *Valentine, A.*, 52; *Van Am*, 41-43; *Van Squibber's Failure*, 189; *Wet Weather at Windsor*, 70; *Who's What and Why in America*, 231; *Word, The*, 266-267

Bangs, John Kendrick, Jr., 98, 106, 153, 237  
Banquets, 41-43, 78, 157, 214-215, 234-236, 247-249, 275, 277-278  
Barnard, President, 58  
Barnard, Judge G. G., 14  
Barnes, James, 169, 184, 295  
Barnum, P. T., 76, 78, 148, 173  
Barrett, John, 210  
Barrie, James M., 184, 189  
Batcheller, Mary Adams, 87  
Baumgardt, B. R., 290  
Beach, Rex, 248

Beall, Everett Stanton, 185  
Beaman, Charles C., 170  
Beer, Thomas, 78, 299  
Beers, Henry A., 63, 201  
Belasco, David, 234  
Belmont, August, 235  
Benson, A. C., 202  
Benton, Joel, 184  
Besant, Walter, 203  
"Big Bear of Arkansas, The," 6  
Bigelow, Poultney, 231  
*Biglow Papers, The*, 74  
Billings, Josh, 270, 271  
Birrell, Augustin, 203  
Black, William Murray, 226  
Blaine, James G., 77-78  
Bohemians, The, 279  
Bok, Edward W., 147-151  
Bonaparte, Napoleon, 161-163, 166, 172  
*Book-Buyer, The*, 182, 200, 209  
*Bookman, The*, 147, 160, 167, 198, 213  
Booth, Edwin, 112  
Borah, Senator, 255  
Borgia, Lucretia, 176  
*Boston Herald*, 28, 209, 282  
*Boston Transcript*, 89, 272  
Bowles, Samuel, 235  
Boyesen, Hjalmar Hjorth, 116  
Bradley, W. H., 190  
Brady, Diamond Jim, 243  
Bridges, Robert, 63, 71, 72, 92, 151, 169, 184, 299  
Brooks, Sydney, 210  
Browne, Charles Farrar, 20  
Browne, H. K., 111  
Browning, Robert, 82, 91, 265  
Bryan, Vincent, 249  
Bryan, William Jennings, 211, 220, 221, 224  
Buffalo Bill, 74-76  
Bull, Frances Amelia, 16

## Index

Bulwer, Edward, 41  
Bunner, Henry Cuyler, 51, 56-60, 64, 125, 197  
Bunyan, John, 9, 72  
Burgess, Gelett, 187, 190  
Burlingham, Charles C., 30  
Burnand, F. C., 179  
Burnet, Dana, 191  
Burroughs, John, 205  
Bush, Clarence G., 98  
Butler, Benjamin Franklin, 53  
Butler, Ellis Parker, 191  
Butler, Nicholas Murray, 36, 54, 201, 212, 288, 299  
Butler, William Allen, 66

Cable, George W., 114, 118, 235, 248, 271  
Caesar, Calpurnia, 176  
Caine, Hall, 115, 188, 189, 192, 193  
Camp, Walter, 119, 159  
Canby, Henry Seidel, 201  
*Cardigan*, 212  
Cardozo, Judge Albert, 14  
Carleton, Henry Guy, 64, 69  
Carleton, Will, 114, 235  
Carnegie, Andrew, 146, 155, 248  
Carruth, Hayden, 184, 185  
Carryl, Guy Wetmore, 184  
Casino Theatre, 93, 242, 243, 246  
Century Association, The, 32, 111, 112, 113, 121, 170-172, 276, 287, 288  
*Century Magazine*, The, 109, 110, 116, 161  
Cervantes, 165  
Cesnola, Col. Luigi di, 30, 33  
Chambers, Robert W., 212, 250  
*Chap-Book*, The, 191, 198, 259  
*Chicago Daily News*, 51, 128  
"Chimmie Fadden," 214

Choate, Joseph H., 29, 32, 33, 158, 170, 171, 172, 269  
Church, F. S., 190  
Churchill, Winston, 202, 215  
Clark, Lewis Gaylord, 99  
Cleveland-Blaine Campaign, 77-78  
Cleveland, Grover, 15, 74, 97, 133, 145  
Cliff-Dwellers, The, 279  
*Collier's Weekly*, 232  
Colton, Arthur, 191  
*Columbia Spectator*, 59, 63  
Column (colum), 51, 79, 98, 99  
Comstock, Anthony, 81-82  
Conkling, Roscoe, 14, 32  
Coombes, George J., 88, 89, 90  
Corbin, John, 182, 212, 234, 299  
*Cornhill Booklet*, The, 260  
Cortelyou, George B., 216, 222, 230  
Coudert, Frederic R., 30, 32  
*Country of the Pointed Firs*, The, 257  
Coward, Edward Fales, 94  
Cox, Palmer, 76  
Cozzens, Frederick S., 19, 20  
Crane, Stephen, 196  
Crawford, F. Marion, 115  
*Critic*, The, 115, 213, 241  
Crockett, Davy, 166  
Crockett, S. R., 212  
Cruger, Mrs. Van Rensselaer, 116  
Cruikshank, George, 111  
Cummings, Homer, 256  
*Curiosities of the American Stage*, 98  
Curtis, George William, 66, 100, 209, 210

d'Ache, Caran, 111, 190  
*Daily Continent*, The, 104

## Index

Daly, Augustin, 243  
*Dartmouth, The*, 44, 45, 46  
Davis, Charles Belmont, 119  
Davis, John W., 15  
Davis, Noah, 30  
Davis, Oscar King, 210, 211  
Davis, Richard Harding, 119, 124, 146, 150, 151, 152, 185, 189, 194-196, 198, 299  
Dawes, Judge Thomas, 7  
Day, Clarence, Jr., 191  
*Day of Doom, The*, 165  
*Declaration of Independence, The*, 7, 24  
Deland, Margaret, 257  
Delavan, D. Bryson, 192, 299  
De Morgan, William, 265  
Depew, Chauncey M., 82, 157, 158, 210, 215, 221, 234, 235, 269  
Derby, George Horatio, 27, 238  
*Dial, The*, 125, 130, 231  
*Dialogues of the Dead*, 163  
Dickens, Charles, 41, 111, 284  
*Dictionary of American Biography*, 14, 181, 272, 298  
Dingus, 46, 49, 58  
Dinwiddie, William, 210  
Diogenes, 163, 164  
Disraeli, Benjamin, 282  
Dobson, Austin, 51, 202  
Dodd, Lee Wilson, 191  
*Dogs and Their Doings*, 26  
Dole, Nathan Haskell, 257  
Dominick, H. B., 215  
Donnelly, Ignatius, 83  
Dowden, Edward, 202  
Doyle, A. Conan, 115, 146, 152-154, 174, 189, 239, 297  
Drake, Gaston V., 184  
Dreiser, Theodore, 187, 212-213, 299  
Drew, John, 112

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 189  
du Chaillu, Paul, 114, 119, 169  
du Maurier, George, 88, 89, 111, 167, 189  
Dunne, Finley Peter, 80, 200, 214, 257, 281, 299  
Dwiggins, Clare Victor, 232  
  
Eaton, Walter Prichard, 234  
*Eccentricities of Genius*, 270, 272, 273, 299  
"Editor's Drawer, The," *see* Bangs, Editor of  
Edwards, General Clarence, 286  
Ehrhart, S. D., 240  
Elizabeth, Queen, 175  
Ellsworth, William Webster, 169, 299  
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 73, 247, 252  
*Ephemeron, The*, 116  
Episcopalianism, 23, 282  
Erben, Admiral, 169  
Evarts, William M., 32  
  
*Fables of G. Washington Aesop*, 27  
*Faust*, 96  
Fearnley, John, 296  
Field, Eugene, 51, 83  
Finley, John H., 260  
Fish, Mrs. Stuyvesant, 245, 246  
Fiske, John, 205  
Folwell, Arthur H., 240  
Ford, James L., 66, 119, 207  
Ford, Paul Leicester, 119  
Ford, Simeon, 269  
Fox, John, Jr., 215, 257  
Franklin, Benjamin, 281  
French, Joseph Lewis, 269  
*Frogs, The*, 164  
Frohman, Charles, 235  
Frost, A. B., 119, 125, 190, 211

## Index

Gardening, 253, 254  
Garfield, Harry A., 15, 48, 299  
Garfield, James A., 15, 221  
Garfield, James R., 15, 239, 255  
Garland, Hamlin, 232, 235, 236  
Garrett, A. C., 201  
Gastit, Horace Dodd, 259  
George, Henry, 85  
Ghosts, 124, 125, 126, 169, 179  
Gibson, Charles Dana, 63, 81,  
    119, 146, 151, 181, 189  
Gilbert, W. S., 50, 93  
*Gilded Age, The*, 197  
Gilder, Jeannette L., 213  
Gilder, Joseph B., 213  
Gilder, Richard Watson, 116,  
    117, 118, 215, 248  
Gillis Brothers, 62, 98  
Gillray, James, 111  
Gilman, Lawrence, 234  
Gissing, George, 202  
Glackens, L. M., 240  
Godwin, Parke, 157  
Goethe, Wolfgang von, 96  
Goldsmith, Oliver, 168, 172  
Golf, 155-156  
Gorgas, William C., 226  
Gosse, Edmund, 51, 200, 201  
Grant, Gordon, 211, 240  
Grant, Robert, 63, 155, 156  
Grant, Ulysses S., 23, 54  
Gray, Blakeney, 259  
Gray, Mary Blakeney, 252  
*Great Cryptogram, The*, 83  
"Great Republic's Peanut Stand,  
    The," 204  
Greble, E. St. John, 226  
Guiterman, Arthur, 191  
*Gulliver's Travels*, 26  
  
Hadley, Arthur T., 212  
Hagedorn, Hermann, 226  
Haggard, Rider, 91

Hale, Edward Everett, 7  
Hale, Senator Frederick, 255  
Halsted School, 146  
Hamilton, Grant, 240  
Harding, Warren G., 278, 292,  
    293, 294  
Hardy, Thomas, 178  
Harper & Brothers, failure of,  
    202, 205, 206, 207  
*Harper's Bazar*, 99, 104, 118, 123,  
    129, 143, 147, 180, 187-190  
Harper, J. Henry, 119, 120, 156,  
    207, 274, 275, 299  
Harper, Joseph W., Jr., 13  
*Harper's Magazine*, 99-101, 104,  
    123, 143, 146, 151, 155, 178,  
    180, 183-191, 199, 260  
*Harper's Weekly*, 16, 102, 104,  
    119, 124, 125, 136, 158, 166,  
    180, 206-228, 232, 239, 259  
*Harper's Young People (Round  
    Table)*, 22, 104, 107, 108, 123,  
    229  
Harrison, Mrs. Burton, 115, 116,  
    234  
Harte, Bret, 205  
*Harvard Crimson*, 46, 53  
*Harvard Lampoon*, 63  
Harvard Union, 277  
Harvey, George, 208, 224, 226-  
    227, 228, 233-236, 247, 248,  
    250, 292-293  
Hawthorne, Julian, 116, 170, 234  
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 41, 90,  
    125  
Hay, John, 210, 235  
Henderson, William J., 63, 69,  
    234, 240, 299  
Henry, O., 191  
Herbert, Victor, 250  
Herford, Beatrice, 191  
Herford, Oliver, 28, 84, 90, 91,  
    113, 184, 190

## Index

Hermann, Victor A., 240  
Herrick, Myron T., 291  
Herrick, Robert, 265  
Hewitt, Abram S., 85-86  
Hipponax, 98  
*History of American Magazines*,  
A, 86, 101, 299  
Hoffman House Saloon, 74  
Hogarth, William, 110  
Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 73, 74,  
82, 131, 247  
Holmes, Samuel V. V., 48  
Holmes, Sherlock, 152, 154, 174,  
239  
Homer, 163, 260  
Hope, Anthony, 115, 146, 156-  
157, 189  
Hopper, DeWolf, 243  
Hornung, E. W., 239, 241  
*House of Harper, The*, 119,  
156  
Howe, Julia Ward, 72, 73, 117,  
118  
Howe, M. A. DeWolfe, 201  
Howells, Mildred, 185, 299  
Howells, William Dean, 71, 91,  
100, 115, 118, 119, 185, 189,  
200, 201, 202, 205, 213, 215,  
232, 234, 235, 247, 248, 257  
Howland, Henry E., 116, 170  
Hubbard, Elbert, 148  
Huneker, James G., 244  
Hutt, Henry, 211  
Hutton, Laurence, 98, 100, 162,  
185, 199  
Hyde, Agnes Lawson, 88  
Hyde, Anne, 105, 237  
Hyde, W. H., 63, 68, 189  
  
*Illustrated Sporting News, The*,  
237, 238, 242  
Ingersoll, Robert G., 82  
"Instructions in Art," 234-236

Intercollegiate Press Association,  
45  
Intimate Journalism, 148-150,  
188, 194  
Irving, Sir Henry, 188  
Irving, Washington, 19, 20, 125,  
126, 281  
Irwin, Wallace, 191, 240  
  
Jackson, A. V. Williams, 55  
Jacobs, W. W., 186  
James, Henry, 72, 73, 177, 189,  
196, 201, 205  
Janis, Elsie, 286  
Janvier, Thomas, 114, 185, 234  
Jefferson, Joseph, 112, 215  
Jefferson, Thomas, 24  
Jenkins, Wilberforce, 148, 152,  
231, 232, 240, 259  
Jerome, Jerome K., 150, 209  
Jewett, Sarah Orne, 257  
Jimmieboy, 106-108  
Johnson, Burgess, 191, 234  
Johnson, Charles Howard, 107,  
108  
Johnson, Robert Underwood,  
116  
Johnson, Samuel, 166, 168  
*Jonathan and His Continent*, 113  
Jones, Mrs. Frederic Rhinelander,  
116  
Jones, Shakespeare, 36, 38  
*Journal of Education*, 162  
Jumbo, 76  
  
Keller, Arthur I., 190, 211  
Kemble, E. W., 69, 190, 238,  
240  
Keppler, Joseph, 240  
Kipling, Rudyard, 119, 120-122,  
124, 150, 169, 173, 188, 189,  
210, 213, 224  
Klein, Manuel, 249

## Index

*Knickerbocker Magazine, The*, 99  
*Ladies' Home Journal, The*, 147, 149, 150, 180  
Lang, Andrew, 51, 200, 201  
Langtry, Lily, 49, 70  
Lanigan, George T., 27, 77  
Lee, Albert, 186  
Leech, John, 111  
Lefevre, Edwin, 211, 234  
Le Gallienne, Richard, 197, 202, 235  
Legion of Honor, 291  
*Letters Home*, 234  
Levering, Albert, 232, 240, 241  
Lewis, Sinclair, 183, 299  
*Life*, 51, 53, 56, 57, 60, 62-86, 92, 99, 101, 102, 104, 109, 110, 163, 184, 189, 200, 213, 244  
Lincoln, Joseph C., 6, 187  
*Literary Digest*, 281  
*Literature*, 21, 180, 183, 200-205  
Lodge, Henry Cabot, 210, 231  
London, Jack, 212  
*London Times*, 200, 202  
Longfellow, Henry W., 73, 247  
Longfellow, Wadsworth, 170  
Loomis, Charles Battell, 184, 240  
Lotos Club, The, 214, 293  
Low, A. Maurice, 210  
Low, Seth, 275  
Lowell, James Russell, 53, 73-75, 91, 112, 281  
Lucian, 163, 164  
Lyon, Morris W., 24  
MacArthur, James, 213  
Macauley, Charles Raymond, 232  
MacLaren, Ian, 115, 167, 189  
MacVeagh, Charles, 97  
MacVeagh, Wayne, 234, 235  
McAdoo, William Gibbs, 256  
McCarthy, Justin, 202  
McClure Syndicate, 263  
McCoy, Frank, 226  
McCunn, Judge John H., 14  
McCutcheon, George Barr, 257  
McKelway, St. Clair, 215, 235  
McKinley, President, 170, 211, 219, 222, 227  
*McTeague*, 202  
McVickar, Henry W., 63, 68, 162, 189  
Mabie, Hamilton W., 215, 232, 235, 248  
Machen, Arthur, 202  
Manchester, Duke and Duchess of, 246  
Mann, A. Sufferan, 259  
Mansfield, Richard, 177  
Marble, Manton, 16, 32  
Marshall, Henry Rutgers, 121  
Martin, Edward Sandford, 41, 63, 64, 65, 119, 130, 184, 213, 299  
Masson, Thomas L., 18, 123, 184, 240, 272  
Matthews, Brander, 63, 119, 125, 185, 192, 197, 212, 215, 248  
Matthews, Franklin, 211  
*Mauve Decade, The*, 78  
Mayer, Henry, 190  
Meade, Admiral, 169  
Mencken, H. L., 191  
Mephistopheles, 96, 97  
Meredith, George, 189  
Metcalfe, James S., 244  
Methodism, 8-12  
Metropolitan Club, 234  
Metropolitan Opera House, 93, 97  
Miles, General Nelson A., 114  
Milton, John, 9  
Mitchell, John Ames, 62-66, 69, 98, 102, 110

## Index

Mitchell, S. Weir, 118, 205  
*More Fables*, 273  
Morgan, John Pierpont, 208  
Morgan, Tom P., 240  
Morley, Arthur Spencer, 260  
Morley, Christopher, 27, 183  
Moses, Montrose J., 262  
Mother Goose, 21, 22, 25  
Mott, Frank Luther, 36, 101, 211, 299  
*Mr. Dooley*, 80, 189, 214  
Mulock, Miss, 27  
Munchausen, Baron, 26, 168  
Munkittrick, R. K., 184  
Munsey, Frank A., 101-104  
*Munsey's Magazine*, 103, 104, 259  
*Munsey's Weekly*, 102-103  
Murphy, Dennis, 134-135  
  
Nankivell, Frank A., 240  
Nansen, Fridtjof, 188, 198  
Nasby, Petroleum V., 270  
Nassau, Mrs. E. L., 22, 23, 26, 27, 88  
*Nation, The*, 231  
Nelson, Henry Loomis, 210  
Newell, Peter, 107, 173-174, 184, 190, 229, 232  
*New Haven Journal Courier*, 158  
Newport, 68, 155, 156, 178, 290  
*New York Evening Post*, 173  
*New York Evening Sun*, 98, 101, 204  
*New York Herald*, 231, 238, 243, 259, 283  
*New York Sun*, 136, 137, 142  
*New York Times*, 130, 136, 139, 141, 232, 260, 262  
*New York Times Saturday Review*, 200  
*New York Tribune*, 107, 141, 167, 174, 292

*New York World*, 16, 142, 243  
New York Yacht Club, 275  
Nicholson, William, 211, 215  
Norris, Frank, 202  
*North American Review*, 224, 227, 232  
North, Ernest Dressel, 109  
Norton, Charles Eliot, 75  
*Nothing to Wear*, 66  
Noyes, Alexander Dana, 276  
Nye, Edgar Wilson (Bill), 114, 120, 131, 255, 270, 271, 272, 281  
  
Ochs, Adolph S., 235  
Odell, Benjamin, 214  
Offenbach, Jacques, 165, 243  
Ogunquit, 252, 257, 296  
Ohio Society of New York, 277  
O'Neill, Rose, 190, 240  
O'Rell, Max, 113  
*Orphée aux Enfers*, 165  
*Our American Humorists*, 18  
*Outlook, The*, 127  
  
Page, Thomas Nelson, 114, 119, 185, 190, 257  
Paine, Albert Bigelow, 119, 191, 234, 299  
Paine, Henry Gallup, 184  
Parker, Alton B., 241  
Parker, C. Gray, 68  
Parrish, Maxfield, 211  
Parsons, Charles, 110  
Parsons, John E., 30-32  
Peary, Robert E., 114, 275  
Peck, Harry Thurston, 36, 43, 44, 51, 198, 213  
Peene, Captain John G., 135, 141, 142, 146  
Penfield, Edward, 190  
Penfield, Roderic C., 236, 242, 246, 249

## Index

Pepper, George Wharton, 296  
Perfidious Imperialism, 223  
Perkins, Thaddeus, 137, 138, 140,  
    141, 145, 177, 179  
Pershing, John J., 296  
Phelps, William Lyon, 159, 199,  
    201, 297  
Philippines, 223-225  
Phillips, David Graham, 119  
Phoenix, John, 27, 28  
*Phoenixiana*, 27, 238  
Players, The, 112  
Plutocratic Ticket, 214  
Podmore, Periwinkle, 191-198,  
    259  
Poe, Edgar Allan, 13, 41, 125  
Pond, James B., 113, 259, 270-  
    273  
Porter, General Horace, 158, 269  
Porter, Judge John K., 30-31  
*Potiphar Papers, The*, 66  
Potter, Henry Codman, 116, 158,  
    215  
Potter, Mrs. James Brown, 83  
Preble, Commodore Edward, 5  
Princeton Dramatic Association,  
    95-96  
*Princetonian, The*, 44  
*Psychology of Laughter*, 281  
*Puck*, 51, 56-60, 69, 99, 101, 104,  
    109, 184, 238, 239-242  
Pugh, J. S., 240  
*Punch*, 124, 172, 179, 180, 189  
Pyle, Howard, 235

*Racine Mercury*, 44  
Raleigh, Sir Walter, 175, 297  
Ralph, Julian, 119  
Reed, Thomas Brackett, 215,  
    235, 255  
Rehan, Ada, 94, 243  
Reid, John, 155

Reinhart, C. S., 189  
Remington, Frederic, 119, 123,  
    190, 211  
Reppier, Agnes, 66, 124, 248, 257  
*Richard Carvel*, 202  
Richards, F. T., 107, 190  
Riis, Jacob, 211  
Riley, James Whitcomb, 69, 184,  
    189  
Robertson, Morgan, 212, 234  
Roche, James Jeffrey, 169, 184  
Roe, Rev. E. P., 83  
Rogers, H. H., 235  
Rogers, Will, 183  
Rogers, W. A., 64, 77, 82, 119,  
    190, 208, 211, 215, 299  
Roosevelt, Alice, 223  
Roosevelt, Quentin, 286  
Roosevelt, Theodore, 78, 85-86,  
    114, 119, 171, 172, 211, 215-  
    223, 227, 229, 230, 262, 283,  
    286  
Root, Elihu, 30, 158, 230  
Ross, Parson, 8  
Rothschild Sandwich, 149  
Russell, Lillian, 242-246, 250  
Russell, Robert Howard, 106, 151  
*Rutgers Targum*, 43  
Ryan, Thomas F., 235

St. Andrew's Golf Club, 155  
St. Botolph Club, 279  
*St. Nicholas*, 28, 108  
Samson, 159, 175  
*San Francisco Argonaut*, 53, 79,  
    89  
Satan, 164  
Satterlee, Herbert L., 63, 299  
*Saturday Review of Literature*,  
    201  
Savage, Henry W., 246  
Scarborough, Dorothy, 125

## Index

Schurz, Carl, 209, 210, 223  
*School for Scandal, The*, 242, 243  
Scollard, Clinton, 74, 184, 234,  
    240  
Scott, Hugh L., 226  
*Scribner's Magazine*, 126  
Sears, Hamblen, 234  
Sedgwick, Anne Douglas, 183  
Sedgwick, Ellery, 260  
Shakespeare-Bacon Controversy,  
    83-84  
Shakespeare, William, 23, 84, 95,  
    150  
Sharp, William, 201  
"Sharps and Flats," 51  
Sheridan, R. B., 243, 246, 250  
Sherman, Frank Dempster, 51,  
    63, 90, 91, 92, 184  
Shinn, Everett, 190, 211  
Sidis, Dr. Boris, 281  
*Sister Carrie*, 213  
*Sixty Years of American Humor*,  
    269  
Sloane, A. Baldwin, 242, 245, 246  
Smedley, William T., 178, 189,  
    212  
Smith, F. Berkeley, 107  
Smith, F. Hopkinson, 114, 119,  
    170, 185, 186, 190, 193, 215,  
    235, 248  
Smith, Goldwin, 201  
Smith, Capt. John, 281  
Smith, Seba, 130, 255  
Smith, (T.) Carlyle, 36, 37, 38,  
    43-46, 50, 58, 68, 77, 184, 240,  
    259  
*Social Pictorial Satire*, 111  
Socrates, 175, 297  
Solomon, 166, 173  
*Sparrowgrass Papers, The*, 19  
*Springfield Republican*, 283  
*Squibob Papers, The*, 27, 28  
Standish, Capt. Myles, 4  
Stanlaws, Penrhyn, 190  
Stanley, Mr. and Mrs. Henry M.,  
    113-114  
Stedman, Arthur, 131  
Stedman, Edmund Clarence, 205  
Sterner, Albert E., 68, 189, 211  
Stetson, Francis Lynde, 15, 32,  
    33, 97  
Stevenson, Robert Louis, 91, 189  
Stimson, Frederic J., 63  
Stockton, Frank R., 91, 112, 114,  
    116, 119, 125, 169, 202, 205  
*Story of a Bad Boy, The*, 28  
Story Tellers' Nights, 114, 115,  
    169, 170  
Strong, Theron G., 34, 299  
Stuart, Ruth McEnery, 185, 190  
*Supernatural in Modern English  
    Fiction, The*, 125  
*Suppressed Chapters*, 151  
"Surprise Party to Mark  
    Twain," 215  
Sutphen, W. G. van Tassel, 185  
Swinburne, Algernon Charles,  
    91, 202  
Symons, Arthur, 202  
Taft, Alphonso, 15  
Taft-Bryan Campaign, 255  
Taft, William Howard, 15, 255,  
    278  
*Taming of the Shrew, The*, 92,  
    94  
Tarkington, Booth, 96, 235, 257,  
    299  
Taylor, Bert Leston, 240  
Tennyson, Alfred, 82, 91, 173  
Thackeray, William M., 20, 41,  
    111  
Thaxter, Celia, 256  
Thomas, Augustus, 215

## Index

Thomas, Edith, 116  
Thorpe, Thomas Bangs, 6  
Thursday Evening Club, 115-  
116  
Ticknor & Company, 90  
Titherington, R. H., 103, 104  
Townsend, Edward W., 169, 185,  
210, 214, 234  
*Town Topics*, 86, 95, 150, 244,  
290  
Tracy, Charles Edward, 97  
*Tragedy of Errors, A*, 102  
Traill, H. D., 200, 201  
*Tribune Primer*, 51  
*Trilby*, 151, 167, 249  
Twain, Mark, 27, 28, 71, 72, 100,  
119, 127, 132, 169, 180, 197,  
203-205, 214-215, 224-225,  
234-236, 247-249, 255, 271,  
272, 281, 283, 284, 297  
Tweed, William Marcy, 14, 24  
Twitchell, Rev. Joe, 235  
  
University Wits, 62-63  
  
Van Amringe, Dean, 41-43, 55  
Vanderpoel, Aaron J., 14  
Van Dyke, Henry, 114, 118, 235,  
248, 278  
*Vanity Fair*, 20, 112  
Van Schaick, S. W., 88-89, 189  
*Vassar Miscellany*, 45  
Verbeck, Frank, 107  
Vergil, 163  
Victoria, Queen, 70, 75, 76, 211  
Voltaire, 253  
  
Wallace, General Lew, 117  
Ward, Artemus, 20, 27, 180, 255,  
270, 273, 281  
Warner, Charles Dudley, 82, 100,  
114, 169, 185, 191, 197  
Washington, George, 6-7  
Watson, Marriott, 212  
Webb, Charles Henry, 184, 284  
Welch, Lewis Sheldon, 159  
Wellington, Duke of, 166, 172  
Wells, Carolyn, 187, 191, 234,  
240, 248, 260, 261  
Wendell, Barrett, 200, 257  
Wenzell, A. B., 189, 211  
Wesleyan University, 11  
Wheeler, George Post, 96  
Wheelwright, J. T., 63  
White, Arnold, 210  
White, Gleason, 109  
White, Horace, 235  
White Mountains, 49, 178, 237,  
252  
White, Stanford, 243  
Whitney, Caspar, 119  
Whitney, William C., 233, 237  
Whittier, John Greenleaf, 247  
Wiggin, Kate Douglas, 185, 248,  
257  
Wigglesworth, Michael, 165  
Wilde, Oscar, 50, 51, 69, 70  
Wilder, H. M., 190  
Willard, Daniel, 278  
William, Emperor, 188  
*Williams Athenaeum*, 46, 48  
Williams, Jesse Lynch, 185  
Wilson, Francis, 93, 112  
Wilson, Woodrow, 212, 256, 293  
Wister, Owen, 119  
Witherup, Anne Warrington,  
188  
*Woman's Home Companion*,  
The, 180  
Wood, General Leonard, 225-  
226, 229, 230, 292-293  
Woodberry, George Edward, 213  
Woods, John M., 259  
*Worcester Gazette*, 284  
  
Xanthippe, 175

## *Index*

*Yale Club*, 275  
*Yale Courant*, 43, 44  
*Yale Library Gazette*, 298  
*Yale Literary Magazine*, 63  
Yale Music Hall, 158-160  
*Yale News*, 43, 45  
"Yankee's Return from Camp,  
The," 6

Yeats, William Butler, 202  
Yonkers, 17, 18-20, 89, 105, 133-  
144, 146-159, 252, 253  
Yonkers Lawn Tennis Club, 145,  
146, 151, 152, 158  
Yonkers Public Library, 146  
Zola, Emile, 188, 212

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